The Social Lives of Paintings in Sixteenth-Century Venice

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Voor mijn ouders & voor J.

Contents

Abbreviations and Spelling

Abbreviations

A.S.F.	Archivio di Stato di Firenze
A.S.V.	Archivio di Stato di Venezia
B.N.M.	Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana
D.B.I.	*Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana 1960-
Thieme-Becker	*Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, eds. Ulrich Thieme and Felix Becker, 37 vols., Leipzig 1907-1950.

A Note on Spelling

When quoting early modern Italian sources, I remain as close to the original language as possible. However, for the sake of readability I have changed the 'v' into the 'u' and vice versa, where necessary.

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Introduction

We think of paintings as objects quietly hanging on the walls of our homes and offices, waiting patiently for someone to throw a glance at them. Or we think of them as artworks on show in galleries and museums, inspiring learned conversations and aesthetic praise. Yet we hardly consider paintings as active participants in social events; as persons we can talk to when they come visit.

In sixteenth-century Venice, however, the situation was altogether different. In June 1586 a painted portrait of Bianca Capello, daughter of a Venetian patrician and grand duchess of Tuscany, visited the Doge (fig. 1, colour plate 4). At two o'clock on a Monday afternoon the owner of the portrait, a certain Francesco Bembo, took it to the Doge's Palace to show it to his head of state. All through the Palace it went, until it reached the Doge's apartments. Once the portrait of Bianca had arrived, it received lavish praise from all people present; and first and foremost from the Doge himself. When the Doge and his guests went to table, the portrait joined them, and throughout the meal Bianca was on everyone's lips. After the meal, the old Doge went to rest a bit and took the portrait with him, deciding to install it on a little table where he usually kept nothing but a little box, his *corno* or ceremonial hat, and a crucifix. Later that day, the portrait moved to another room in the Palace, where it received visits by several dignitaries, among whom the pow-

erful *procuratore* Giacomo Emo, the bishop of Brescia Gianfrancesco Morosini, and Alfonso II d'Este, duke of Ferrara. When these men were alone with the portrait, Francesco Bembo overheard them, and heard his head of state say to Emo, his confidant: '*io son innamorato, guardate!*'[1] And the visit ended with Bembo leaving the Palace without his portrait; he had to acquiesce in the Doge's wish to keep it in the Doge's Palace for one night.[2]

This anecdote may seem strange to us, readers in the twenty-first century. It strongly suggests that, in the eyes of contemporaries, the Venetian portrait of Bianca Capello kept up a social life. The portrait circulated; it was entertained by the Venetian Doge and his guests; and it spent the night in the Doge's apartments. Yet such a view, that paintings had social lives, is hardly compatible with our modern-day ideas about their nature. Therefore we may ask: how can we understand such an anecdote? And are our current ways of thinking about painting really adequate when applied to societies of the past like sixteenth-century Venice?

Nowadays we do not easily think of paintings as living objects, which move around and act upon human beings; we have a very different notion of what paintings are and should be. As I set out to demonstrate in this thesis, this has long made us indifferent to the ways paintings functioned in their original social contexts; and it has detached us from the riches of materials still to be found in the archives. The vast correspondence of Bianca Capello, which is the main source for the anecdote above, has been known to scholars for some time; yet up to now its true value was never recognized. Yet if we do take such material into account, it will affect the way we think about painting, still the principal model for how we think about art in the Western world, and have major implications for the way we practice art history.

[1] 'I am in love, look!'

[2] For records of the visit of the portrait of Bianca Capello to the Doge, see letters written by Francesco Bembo and by one Mazzino Ebreo to Bianca Capello herself, which are preserved in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Mediceo del Principato* 5942, c. 649r-650r (Bembo) and c. 663r-v (Ebreo). See also Karla Langedijk, *The Portraits of the Medici: 15th - 18th Centuries*, vol. I, Florence 1981, p. 321. For a full analysis of what happened with the Venetian portrait of Bianca Capello, I refer to Chapter Four.

The Paintings in the Doge's Palace

The visit of Bianca's portrait to the Doge has brought us right into the heart of the Venetian Republic, and in connection with that, into the heart of Venetian painting. For the Doge's Palace was not only the centre of the Venetian state and its administration, the residence of the Doge and the court of law; it was also the place where countless paintings, made by the best painters of the Republic, celebrated the glory of Venice. Nowhere else in Venice or on Venetian territory can we find painted decorations on such a scale; no other paintings have such a general relevance for the way the Venetians thought about themselves; or were accessible to such a large part of the Republic's elite.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the paintings of the Doge's Palace figure in many ancient texts, in which they evoke a large amount of responses. This wealth of available source material has not, however, resulted in a comparable amount of art-historical scholarship. The paintings of the Doge's Palace have hardly found their way into the modern 'canon' of Venetian art, despite the existence of a few specialized studies.[3] These studies for their part tend to overlook the importance of contemporary responses; or they confine themselves to the analysis of a single literary genre. Yet if we want to know how people originally interacted with these paintings, sources in a variety of genres should be taken into account. This, then, is what we will do over the following pages; based on the premise that the paintings of the Doge's Palace may offer us a first indication of how to study the social lives of Venetian paintings.

[3] See especially Staale Sinding-Larsen, *Christ in the Council Hall: Studies in the Religious Iconography of the Venetian Republic*, Rome 1974; Wolfgang Wolters, *Der Bilderschmuck des Dogenpalastes: Untersuchungen zur Selbstdarstellung der Republik Venedig im 16. Jahrhundert*, Wiesbaden 1983; Patricia Fortini Brown, 'Painting and History in Renaissance Venice', *Art History* 7 (1984), pp. 263-94; Filippo de Vivo, 'Historical Justifications of Venetian Power in the Adriatic', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64 (2003), pp. 159-76. The paintings' relative neglect by academic art historians may also have to do with the limited artistic quality of the ensembles nowadays on view, which are replacements of works by such venerated masters as Giovanni Bellini and Titian, which were lost earlier in the sixteenth century.

The Sala del Maggior Consiglio

For a long time the most spacious hall of Europe, the Sala del Maggior Consiglio or Great Council Hall offered ample space for pictorial decorations (fig. 2). These decorations have always consisted of a mixture of genres: civic history, allegory, portraiture, and religious scenes together form a programme that celebrates the glory of the city-state. Besides the narrative scenes on the hall's northern, western and southern walls, depicting episodes from the Republic's illustrious past, there is a frieze with the portraits of the first seventy-six doges, ordered chronologically all around the room; a ceiling showing virtuous deeds by virtuous men, while the three central canvases contain allegories demonstrating Venice's good government; and, at the eastern end of the room, where the Doge and his advisors were usually sitting, is the coronation of Mary in heaven, also known as the *Paradiso*.

This was the room where the so-called Great Council gathered; the largest body of the Venetian government, which consisted of all male members of the Venetian nobility – some two thousand persons in the sixteenth century.[4]

Paintings as Proof

Of the paintings with historical subject matter, certainly the most important are those representing the so-called Peace of Venice, that is, the series of events resulting in the peace treaty between the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa and Pope Alexander III on Venetian territory in the year 1177 (for examples see figs. 3 and 4).[5] The story is, indeed, one of the principal components of the so-called Myth of Venice. As we know now, Venice did not participate in the conflict, which was the very reason why the parties chose its grounds as the place to make peace. In the centuries following the events, however, the Republic managed to blow up its own role to legendary proportions. Gradually it came to represent itself as the saviour of the Pope and Christianity at large; as the bringer of peace to Italy and the world; and

[4] For the history of the room and its decorations, see Wolters, *Der Bilderschmuck des Dogenpalastes*; for a catalogue of the all the paintings, see Umberto Franzoi, *Storia e leggenda del Palazzo Ducale di Venezia*, Venice 1982.

[5] De Vivo, 'Historical Justifications of Venetian Power', *passim*; also for further literature.

thus, the story was used to legitimize Venice's power in the Eastern Mediterranean and Adriatic seas, which, especially during the sixteenth century, was anything but unchallenged.

When during this period voices from outside Venice, mostly historians working for the Vatican, persistently contested the Venetian interpretation of events, Venetian historians used the paintings in the Doge's Palace in defence of the Republic, pointing to their supposed evidential value.[6] Marin Sanudo (1466-1536), the famous Venetian chronicler, concisely summarized their principal argument: 'If it had not been true, our Venetians would never have had it painted.'[7] As Filippo de Vivo has noted, the Venetian state even instructed its ambassadors abroad to look for painted records of the Peace of Venice in their cities of residence; in this way, they effectively deflected attention from the story of 1177, focusing instead on the story's material representations.[8] What support for their cause did the Venetians hope to find in paintings?

We find their principal ideas summarized by Fortunato Olmo, an erudite monk who in the 1630s was one of the last to make a significant contribution to the debate. Olmo's was by far the largest compilation of material supporting the Venetian cause: he managed to fill seven manuscript volumes.[9] The following comes from an earlier work of his, published in 1629:

> Because [the paintings] have been made on command of many illustrious persons, who were entrusted with the government of the Republic, it is intoler-

[6] De Vivo, 'Historical Justifications of Venetian Power', p. 168 and further.

[7] '… si la non fusse sta vera, li nostri Venitiani non la ariano fata mai dipenzer.' Quoted after Brown, 'Painting and History', p. 269 and n. 41.

[8] De Vivo, 'Historical Justifications', p. 171. Indeed, the story had found its way to other countries; most prominently to the Vatican. The very climax of the whole episode, the moment when the Emperor kneels in front of the Pope and asks him for forgiveness, was depicted in 1563-1564 on a wall of the newly built Sala Regia, the audience hall of the Popes. It was commissioned by the Venetian Cardinal Marcantonio da Mula from his fellow countryman Giuseppe Salviati. Its historical truth increasingly questioned, in the seventeenth century the painting would come to stand at the centre of a severe diplomatic conflict between Venice and the Pope. See Jan L. de Jong, 'Propagating Venice's Finest Hour: Vicissitudes of Giuseppe Porta Salviati's Painting of Pope Alexander III and Emperor Frederick Barbarossa in the Sala Regia of the Vatican Palace', in: Annette de Vries (ed.), *Cultural Mediators: Artists and Writers at the Crossroads of Tradition, Innovation and Reception in the Low Countries and Italy 1450-1650*, Leuven 2008, pp. 109-26.

[9] De Vivo, 'Historical Justifications', p. 171.

able to hear our opponents say that they are a caprice of the painter. They are relying on the verses of Horace, "Painters and poets always had the same power to dare all things conceivable," as if in a city hall it could happen that a painter's hand would be so daring as to express fully to his own liking a falsification unjustified by fact. But the fact is that the licence of painters is not as big as that.[10]

Olmo puts forward two arguments. First, he appeals to the authority of the illustrious patrons who commissioned the paintings, virtuous and exemplary men. Secondly, he downplays the licence of painters to invent: both painters and patrons are bound to what actually was in the world, he argues, to what actually happened (*il fatto*). In a public place, there is no room for images showing things that never happened, paintings without prototypes, so to say.[11] Paintings had to be true.

The monk and historian *fra* Girolamo Bardi (c. 1544-1594) came with similar arguments. Bardi, originally a Florentine, was one of the three members of a committee that devised a new decorative programme for the two largest rooms of the Palace after they were lost in a disastrous fire (1577).[12] Not only did he refer to existing paintings as evidence for historical events; he also mentioned paintings that had long since disappeared. In other words,

[10] 'Perilche essendo queste state fatte per comandamento di molte persone Illustri, a'quali era raddomandato il governo della Republica, e intolerabile l'udirsi dire da gli Avversari, che questo fosse un capriccio del pittore. Inducendosi da loro gli versi di Oratio, che *Pictoribus atque Poetis // Quidlibet audendi semper fuit aequa potestas*, quasi che in un palazzo publico possa darsi, che senza esser preceduto il fatto, vi fosse mano di pittore tanto ardita, che anzi esprimesse il falso a pieno arbitrio. [...] Ma il fatto non ista, che la licenza de'pittori sia tanta.' Fortunato Olmo, *Historia della venuta a Venetia occultamente nel 1177 di Papa Alessandro III e della vittoria ottenuta da Sebastiano Ziani Doge* (Venice, 1629), pp. 16-17.

[11] Similar arguments may be found in earlier treatises on painting written in other areas of Italy, such as Giovanni Andrea Gilio's well-known *Dialogo nella quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de' pittori circa l'istorie* (1564). See the edition by Paola Barocchi, *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento*, vol. II, Bari 1961, p. 39: '… 'l pittore istorico altro non è che un traslatore, che porti l'istoria da una lingua in un'altra, e questi da la penna al pennello, da la scrittura a la pittura.'

[12] Iain Fenlon, *The Ceremonial City: History, Memory and Myth in Renaissance Venice*, New Haven and Londen 2007, p. 328; De Vivo, 'Historical Justifications', p. 168; Wolters, *Der Bilderschmuck des Dogenpalastes*, pp. 32-33; and for Bardi in the context of Italian historiography in general, Eric Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance*, Chicago 1981, pp. 379-380. The text that may be identified with this programme was discovered by Wolfgang Wolters (see Wolfgang Wolters, 'Der Programmentwurf zur Dekoration des Dogenpalastes nach dem Brand vom 20. Dezember 1577', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 12 (1966), pp. 271-318).

Bardi tried to provide the paintings with a pseudo-genealogy. For he reported that when he visited the burnt remains of the Great Council Hall, he found traces of much earlier paintings, executed in the Greek style (*in maniera greca*), which allegedly had been started in 1226, that is, we may infer, when some of the eyewitnesses of the events of 1177 were still alive.[13] Bardi wrote: 'Many years ago [the story] was painted on the walls of the Great Council Hall, as is shown by the epitaphs and by the manner in which they were represented, with the crudeness of the art of that time.'[14] In response to the opponents of the Venetian cause, Bardi reconstructed a partially fictive genealogy of the paintings and their authorship.[15]

In this way, the Venetian reading of the past was legitimized and authenticated, for Bardi made it look as if from their historical origins to the author's present, the story of the Peace of Venice had been directly transmitted in paint.[16] Underlying his argument is the assumption we already found in a slightly different form in the work of Marin Sanudo and Fortunato Olmo, which can be traced in practically all other writings having anything to do with this debate: that these paintings have evidential value.

It will come as no surprise, however, that opponents of Venice took a different view on the matter. The papal historian Cesare Baronio (1538-1607), most prominently, refuted much of the evidence the Venetians had brought

[13] See Brown, 'Painting and History', pp. 270-71.

[14] '… et molti anni prima fu dipinta ne muri della Sala del maggior Consiglio, come gli Epitassii, et gli habiti con iquali furono rappresentati dalla rozzezza dell'arte di quel tempo…' Girolamo Bardi, *Vittoria navale ottenuta dalla republica venetiana contra Othone, figliuolo di Federico, primo imperadore, per la restitutione di Alessandro terzo, pontefice massimo* (Venice, 1584), p. 65.

[15] In Bardi's account, the earlier paintings were to be used as models for the new paintings after the fire: '… il detto Francesco Barbaro […] volse, che io cavassi in scrittura tutto quello, che si conteneva ne' quadri dipinti del Gran Consiglio, affine, che dovendosi ridipingere si fatta Historia, vi si ritornassero le medesime cose di prima.' Bardi, *Vittoria navale ottenuta dalla republica venetiana*, p. 64.

[16] In her seminal work on the painted decorations of the Sala del Maggior Consiglio, Patricia Fortini Brown has shown that there were great similarities between the historical scenes in the subsequent stages of the decorations. Comparing the extant paintings with drawings related to the earlier versions of the scenes and with descriptions of the paintings in the hall before the 1577 fire, she concludes that the narrative cores of the scenes usually remained fairly consistent (Brown, 'Painting and History', p. 273 and further). Although the Venetians several times completely substituted old paintings for new ones, they preferred to talk of 'restoration' (*ristaurare*) or 'renovation' (*rinovare*), and thus stressed continuity rather than change. See Erika Tietze-Conrat, 'Decorative Paintings of the Venetian Renaissance Reconstructed from Drawings', *Art Quarterly* 3 (1940), pp. 15-39, here pp. 15-16.

forward and instead turned toward documents contemporary to the Peace written by eyewitnesses. He laughed at the idea that paintings could serve as historical evidence. Yet, Baronio's position regarding the question was far from consistent: when earlier in his career the ancient Christian catacombs of Rome were discovered, and in them early Christian art was found, Baronio used it in a similar, 'Venetian' way.[17] This suggests that a person's view on the functions and effects of paintings was not necessarily constant: it could change along with one's political, religious, or social agenda. This means that 'function' was something altogether fluid: depending on the circumstances, one painting could play various roles – just like human beings, we might say.

Paintings as Presence

The next example will make this even more clear. For, as we are about to see, the very same paintings that the Venetians used as historical evidence, at the same time were seen as a memorial to illustrious fellow citizens. Many paintings in the Doge's Palace contained human figures, often bystanders, who had the facial features of prominent men in Venetian public life. People wrote about these portraits as if the paintings and portrayed men were one and the same thing; as if the paintings in the rooms of the Palace actually made the portrayed men present. This reminds us of the treatment received by the portrait of Bianca Capello, which travelled through the very rooms of which we are speaking here: she must have come face to face with her painted fellow countrymen. Yet unlike Bianca, these portrayed men did not come on their own: a single canvas often contained many portraits at one time, and these only formed a part of the larger historical scene (for example, fig. 3).

This may be the reason why the phenomenon has received so little attention in art-historical literature: Venetian painting was exceptional in the

[17] De Vivo, 'Historical Justifications', p. 166; Francis Haskell, *History and its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past*, New Haven and London 1993, pp. 102-104. See also Ingo Herklotz, '*Historia sacra* und mittelalterliche Kunst während der zweiten Hälfte des 16. Jahrhunderts in Rom', in: Romeo de Maio (ed.), *Baronio e l'arte*, Sora 1985, pp. 21-74, here pp. 65-66. For Baronio and the discovery of the catacombs in their wider tridentine context, see also Simon Ditchfield, *Liturgy, Sanctity and History in Tridentine Italy: Pietro Maria Campi and the Preservation of the Particular*, Cambridge 1995, particularly p. 85 and further.

amount of portraits it contained, but why and to what purpose has not been satisfactorily explained.[18] Again, this seems to have to do with modern ways of looking and thinking. The paintings of the Doge's Palace do not comply with later ideas of painterly genres.[19] Whether they are characterized as narrative scenes, *historie*, portraits, or cityscapes (many contain elaborate architectural backgrounds), they will always be wronged. And the way these paintings were received in their own time only seems to reflect the plurality of their contents.

In his guidebook to the city of Venice, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare* (1581), Francesco Sansovino (1521-1586) diligently described all the paintings in the Doge's Palace, with special attention for those in the largest room of the building. These, we may remember, had only recently been consumed by fire, which urged Sansovino to record them faithfully together with the inscriptions that had explained their contents. He discussed the many portraits that had embellished these paintings separately. His account starts like this: 'In all these pictures were various portraits of Senators and illustrious men, painted over time by various excellent Masters.'[20] Subsequently, he needs no less than four densely printed pages to name them all.[21] This is a truly remarkable document of who counted as important in late sixteenth-century Venice, but also a testimonial to the love a man like Sansovino felt for his exemplary ancestors.

The character of the men recited by Sansovino is diverse: he mentions procurators and senators, cardinals, painters and architects, scholars, poets, and men of arms, not all of whom had necessarily lived in the same age. Thus we encounter 'in the picture in which the Pope conferred the indulgence, with various Cardinals on the right and on the left,' 'almost all Venetian Cardinals

[18] For anachronic elements also in paintings from other parts of Italy, from Germany, and the Netherlands, see Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, New York 2010.

[19] There is not much theoretical literature on the notion of genre in the art of painting; see, however, Carolyn Wilde, 'Introduction: Alberti and the Formation of Modern Art Theory', p. 14, and Paul Duro, 'Academic Theory 1550-1800', pp. 93-95, in: Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde (eds.), *A Companion to Art Theory*, Oxford 2002.

[20] 'Ne quali tutti quadri erano diversi ritratti di Senatori et huomini illustri, dipinti di tempo in tempo da diversi eccellenti Maestri.' Francesco Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima et singolare descritta in XIV libri*, Bergamo: Leading 2002 (photomechanical reprint of the 1581 edition), p. 130v.

[21] For the whole section see pp. 130v-132v.

that had existed until this time, that is Angelo Correr who was later Gregory XII; Francesco Lando, Pietro Barbo, who when made Pope was called Paul II,' and so the list continues; we find Pietro Bembo and Fra Giocondo, 'architect from Verona,' Gentile Bellini, Emmanuel Chrysoloras, Ermolao Barbaro, Lodovico Ariosto, and Agostino Barbarigo 'who died in the battle of '71' (the Battle of Lepanto), to name just a few.[22] It is clear that in these paintings men from different periods had anachronically been placed next to each other. Sansovino arranged the names according to the paintings in which the men were portrayed; he mentions their positions and achievements, and their relations to family members who have also been honoured with a portrait on these walls. He finds it worth noting when portraits are done from life, like the one by Tintoretto of Stefano Tiepolo *procuratore di San Marco*. Or when the portraits are otherwise painted very lively: 'And there, over a balcony, were portrayed Andrea Gradenigo, father of Luigi, with Senatorial clothes on, and Giovanni Battista Ramusio, Secretary of the Council of Ten, who was the father of Paolo, the two of whom seemed to be talking to each other.'[23] And therefore, Sansovino concludes, the destruction of the portraits means a great loss: 'That all these things were consumed by the fire of 1577 gave the whole universe great sorrow, because of the loss of the features (*fatture*) of so many valuable men, and of the memory of so many excellent persons, which the world only rarely possesses in abundance.'[24] Most of the men in his survey had died long before Sansovino was writing; but what he is suggesting is that their real, or at least second death took place with the fire: it was only then that their faces disappeared and the memory of their great deeds was wiped out. His lengthy enumeration could therefore be understood as an attempt to undo this second death and to revive the mem-

[22] 'Et piu oltre, nel quadro dove il Papa co[n]cedeva l'indulge[n]tia con diversi Cardinali dalla destra, et dalla sinistra, si vedevano espressi mirabilme[n]te quasi tutti i Cardinali Vinitiani, ch'erano stati fino a quei tempi, cioè Angelo Corero che fu poi Gregorio XII. Francesco Lando, Pietro Barbo, che poi fatto Papa fu detto Paolo Secondo […].' Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima*, p. 131r. The 'battle (*giornata*) of '71,' in which Agostino Barbarigo passed away, is the Battle of Lepanto, fought in 1571.

[23] 'Et ivi sopra un poggiuolo erano ritratti Andrea Gradenigo padre di Luigi con veste Senatoria, et Giovanni Battista Ramusio Secretario del Consiglio de Dieci, che fu padre di Paolo, i quali pareva che ragionassero insieme.' Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima*, p. 132v.

[24] 'Le quali tutte cose consumate dal fuoco del 1577. apportarono gran dispiacere a tutto l'universale, per la perdita delle fatture di tanti valentihuomini, et delle memorie di tanti personaggi eccellenti, de quali il mondo è rare volte copioso.' Ibid., p. 132v.

ory of Venice's *huomini virtuosi*. As if it were a *messa dei defunti*, his recital of these names is almost a religious ritual.[25]

So although we are still concerned with the same paintings in the Doge's Palace, Sansovino confronts us with a completely different view. Writing about the portraits, he is not interested in historical proof, or whether paintings tell the truth or not: what he is after is the ability of paintings to make people present, while they are in fact absent. Are these two very different approaches in any way compatible? And how do they relate to our modern notion of genre – if at all?

Sansovino's account raises more questions. What about the viewers of these portraits? Much is expected of them. The enumeration of portraits hints at the existence of a public that shared Sansovino's veneration for the sitters. There must have been viewers and users of the paintings in the Doge's Palace who knew who these men were and what status they had; but we seem to have problems getting these viewers in front of the lens. In other words, Sansovino's account presupposes a social network of which the viewers, the portraits, and their sitters were a part. But what do we know of this social network?

Paintings as Prodigies – The Praise of Venetian Art

The notion of the social network was also at the basis of the following description of a painting, a battle scene once again located in the Sala del Maggior Consiglio (fig. 5):

> And on the other side of this same Sala [Titian] did a battle scene, in which there appear soldiers and horses in a variety of forms, and other extremely notable features. The latter include a young woman who has fallen into a ditch and is climbing out: she uses the bank for support with a stretch of the

[25] For the medieval memory cult, see Arnold Angenendt, 'Theologie und Liturgie der mittelalterlichen Toten-Memoria', in: Karl Schmidt and Joachim Wollasch (eds.), *Memoria: Der geschichtliche Zeugniswert des liturgischen Gedenkens im Mittelalter*, Munich 1984, pp. 79-199, here pp. 188 and further.

leg which is highly natural, and the leg gives the impression not of painting, but of actual flesh.[26]

The author of this passage is Lodovico Dolce (1508-1568), a professional writer or *poligrafo* befriended to Titian, who is well-known for his *Dialogue on painting* (1557). Dolce's words on Titian's battle contain a number of striking features. He does not say anything about the painting's subject matter but that it is a battle. He does not mention the history to which this painting referred, nor does he mention the supposedly evidential value of this painting. His interest clearly lies with other things. For him, this painting of a battle scene is first and foremost an index of the painterly genius of its maker, Titian. The artist has succeeded in making a painting that no longer looks like a painting: the young woman's leg seems to be made of flesh, not paint.

The same painting was also described by Francesco Sansovino. He, too, knew Titian personally; his father Jacopo Sansovino, the sculptor-architect, was a close friend of the painter.

> In the fifth [painting], made by Titian with incredible industry and artistry, was represented the battle of Spoleto in Umbria. There, in addition to the other noble things that appeared, a captain showed himself to the eyes of the viewers, and, in order to be ready for the fight, had himself armed by a boy, on the breast of whose armour gleamed with incredible mastery the brilliancy, the lights, and the reflections of the weapons and the robes in which the boy was dressed.[27]

Like Dolce, Sansovino had noticed the young woman at the bottom of the painting (fig. 6): 'Likewise there was a horse of extreme beauty, and a young

[26] '… e dall'altra parte della detta Sala una battaglia; ove ci sono diverse forme di soldati, cavalli, & altre cose notabilissime, e fra le altre una giovane, che essendo caduta in un fosso, uscendo si attiene alla sponda con una isporger di gamba naturalissimo, e la gamba non par, che sia Pittura, ma carne istessa.' Lodovico Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura*, ed. Mark Roskill, *Dolce's Aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento* (reprint of the 1968 ed.), Toronto 2000, p. 190.

[27] 'Nel quinto fatto da Titiano con incredibile industria et arte, si rappresentava la giornata di Spoleti nell'Umbria, Dove, oltre alle cose nobili che vi apparivano, si mostrava a gli occhi de riguarda[n]ti un Capitano ch'essendo desto al romore d'una zuffa si faceva armare da un ragazzo, nel petto della cui corazza, risplendevano co[n] incredibil magistero, i lustri, i chiari, et i reverberi dell'armi, et de panni, de quali era vestito il ragazzo.' Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima*, p. 125v.

woman who, climbing out of a ditch, showed great fear on her face.'[28] In his ekphrastic prose, the author is not so much concerned with giving a faithful and complete description of the painting; rather, he is trying to approach the effects the painting has on its viewers. He is making it visible even for those who could not see it.[29]

Both Dolce and Sansovino praise Titian's battle painting, which was lost in the fire of 1577, as a virtuous imitation of nature by an ingenious Venetian artist. This may be the type of response to early modern Italian painting we are most familiar with: praise for an artist's skills in lifelike imitation. In art-historical writing, the conventional character of such responses all too often becomes an excuse for dismissing them as meaningless *topoi*; at other times, they are treated as if occurring in an autonomous art world, apparently cut loose from the troubles of daily life.[30] Yet no such autonomous art world existed in sixteenth-century Venice.[31]

We may therefore very well wonder whether the topos of lifelike representation, as practiced by Dolce and Sansovino, did not actually function in a network of exchanges in which paintings, painters, prototypes, viewers, and their responses interacted with each other; in other words, whether the responses of Dolce and Sansovino were not in fact grounded in social reality. Not only was the upcoming genre of art criticism, to which, we might say, their texts belong, a thoroughly social genre, being an interaction with the artwork, fellow viewers, and readers; we should also take seriously the ques-

[28] 'Vi era parimente un cavallo di estrema bellezza, et una giovane che uscendo di una fossa, et salendo di sopra, mostrava nel volto, una gran paura.' Ibid., p. 125v.

[29] This effect of lively text and speech is known as the rhetorical figure of *enargeia*. See Caroline van Eck, *Classical Rhetoric and the Visual Arts in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 2007, p. 7; Valeska von Rosen, 'Die Enargeia des Gemaldes. Zu einem vergessenen Inhalt des Ut-pictura-poesis und seiner Relevanz fur das cinquecenteske Bildkonzept', *Marburger Jahrbuch fur Kunstwissenschaft* 27 (2000), pp. 171-208; John Shearman, *Only Connect… : Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance*, Princeton 1992, chapter five.

[30] See, for example, Norman E. Land, *The Viewer as Poet: The Renaissance Response to Art*, University Park 1994, and, more recently, Valeska von Rosen, *Mimesis und Selbstbezüglichkeit in Werken Tizians: Studien zum venezianischen Malereidiskurs*, Emsdetten 2001.

[31] For the rise of the concept of autonomous art at the turn of the nineteenth century, see for example Michael Podro, *The Critical Historians of Art*, New Haven and London 1982, in particular pp. 5-8.

tion what their remarks on the lifelikeness of Venetian paintings, conventional as they may be, are meant to convey.[32]

On the preceding pages, we have encountered a variety of approaches to the paintings of the Doge's Palace, all in contemporary texts. So here we have a body of responses reflecting on the most important painted decorations of the Venetian republic; what they communicate to us is, to say the least, a mixed message. As it turns out, firstly, these paintings had a variety of functions and effects, and thereby defy our modern-day notion of fixed genres. We need new concepts which may help us understand how paintings in Venice actually worked. Secondly, these paintings seem to have functioned in social networks, but what did these networks look like; and how did paintings and people embedded in such networks interact? Thirdly, many sources stress the remarkable degree of lifelikeness accomplished by the artists. How are we to understand the claim made by these sources that these paintings are somehow 'alive'? And, finally, how does their having artistic lifelikeness relate to the paintings' social lives?

Objectives

The objective of this study therefore is to map the social lives of selected sixteenth-century Venetian paintings, by means of a detailed reconstruction of the networks in which paintings were embedded and of how these developed over time. My final aim is to arrive at a new understanding of what paintings were in sixteenth-century Venice, and how they functioned as 'living objects'. Thus, this thesis seeks to understand the 'lives' of works of art in a very different direction than, to name an example, Fredrika Jacobs' *The Living Image in Renaissance Italy* (2005), which discusses the 'lifelikeness' and 'aliveness' of art mainly from the point of view of the contemporary natural sciences.[33] Nor is this a study of sixteenth-century art criticism and theory; thinking and writing about art are relevant to the extent that they are *social* activities. For I believe that the lives of artworks cannot be fully understood

[32] Caroline van Eck, 'Living Statues: Alfred Gell's Art and Agency, Living Presence Response and the Sublime', *Art History* 33 (2010), pp. 642-659, here p. 649.
[33] Fredrika H. Jacobs, *The Living Image in Renaissance Art*, Cambridge 2005.

without taking the social dimension into account. How are we going to achieve this?

The idea that paintings are parts of social networks in which they interact with human beings has a double foundation: it is inspired by recent anthropological theory as well as grounded in historical thought. To start with anthropology, over the last decades art and artefacts have become an increasingly important topic of analysis in the field. Perhaps the single most influential voice has been the British anthropologist Alfred Gell, who in his posthumously published book *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (1998) proposed that artefacts are 'social agents', just like human beings; and that these 'social agents' are embedded in networks – the 'art nexus' – which basically consist of four players: the prototype or thing or person represented; the index, which is Gell's name for the art object; the artist; and the recipient (who may be the patron). According to Gell, art objects confer agency upon the other players in the art nexus. As it is agency that characterizes personhood, according to Gell, his anthropological theory of art approaches art objects as person-like.[34] What it comes down to is that the concept of the art nexus may serve as a means to reconstruct a painting's social life.

[34] Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, Oxford 1998, p. 5: '… a species of anthropological theory in which persons or 'social agents' are, in certain contexts, substituted for by art objects'; ibidem, p. 96: '… works of art, images, icons, and the like have to be treated, in the context of an anthropological theory, as person-like; that is, sources of, and targets for, social agency.' For critical assessments of Gell's theory and its implications for art history see Caroline van Eck, 'Living Statues'; Robin Osborne and Jeremy Tanner (eds.), *Art's Agency and Art History*, Oxford 2006; Matthew Rampley, 'Art History and Cultural Difference: Alfred Gell's Anthropology of Art', *Art History* 28 (2005), pp. 524-551; Robert Layton, 'Art and Agency: A Reassessment', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 9 (N.S.) (2003), pp. 447-464. Another important contribution has been Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge 1986.
In his introductory essay to the volume (here in particular pp. 4-5), Appadurai argues that in order to understand the concrete, historical circulation of things, we have to let go of our contemporary Western common sense that things are just things and instead become 'methodological fetishists'. While for Appadurai, this is merely the starting point for an investigation of one particular phase of a thing's social life, namely the 'commodity situation', in which 'its exchangeability […] for some other thing is its socially relevant factor,' (p. 13) – he is thus mainly concerned with matters of value, exchange, and economy – my objective is to examine the social life of a particular group of things in its broadest sense, in fact to examine the notion of the social life itself, for which I find Gell's concept of agency more useful. Finally, it needs to be said that the title of this thesis was conceived independently of Appadurai's work, and is therefore not necessarily an allusion to that work.

More in general, the advantage of an anthropological approach to European art of the past – as opposed to, say, an aesthetic or semiotic approach – is that it asks for a fully contextual, synchronic analysis, independent of modern Western conceptions of art, which indeed only crystallized during the nineteenth century. Designed as a framework with global scope, Gell's theory is particularly apt to be applied to art of the premodern West, in which modern notions of what art is, did not yet count; and it removes the emphasis from the work of art itself to the producing culture as a whole.[35]

In the case of sixteenth-century Venice, this culture had itself a truly social understanding of personhood; which is another reason why anthropology can so fruitfully be put to the task. As Peter Burke explains, the Italy of the large cities was a 'theatre society', in which everyone had a social role which needed to be played with style (*fare bella figura*).[36] Peoples' concerns were not with sincerity – which other cultures, like our own, tend to value more – but with the inherently social factors of appearance and honour. It was all about giving a convincing performance of one's role to one's public. In this theatrical society, art objects became instruments with which one could enhance one's public appearance. This may sound like a familiar idea in the study of art and culture known as conspicuous consumption; yet what I would like to propose is a much more far-reaching thought: that in this culture of role-playing and conventions, with this truly social understanding of personhood, art objects could under certain circumstances play the role of human beings; they could become *personae*.[37] We only need to think back to the example of Bianca Capello's portrait, visiting the Doge and his friends, to grasp what all

[35] See also Howard Morphy and Morgan Perkins, 'The Anthropology of Art: A Reflection on its History and Contemporary Practice', in: idem (eds.), *The Anthropology of Art: A Reader*, Oxford 2006, pp. 1-26. There is a strong parallel here with discussions of non-western living objects or 'object-beings' (in the words of the American ritual theorist Ronald Grimes) in the field of museum studies: see Moira Simpson, *Making Representations: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era*, London 1996, p. 196, who refers to Ronald Grimes, *Ritual Criticism: Case Studies in its Practice, Essays on its Theory*, Columbia, S.C. 1990, p. 254. I return to this in my conclusion.

[36] Peter Burke, *The Historical Anthopology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication*, Cambridge 1987, p. 10. For the theatricality and rituality of life in Venice, see, among others, Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, Princeton 1981, and Fenlon, *The Ceremonial City*.

[37] The concept of conspicuous consumption was introduced by the economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen in his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, first published in New York in 1899.

this role-playing could lead to: the adoration of a portrait as if it were the sitter herself.

The idea that Italian society was theatrical in character was not only expressed in texts – the best known example of textual sources surely being Baldassare Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528). Paintings also reflected on their own abilities to take up person-like qualities. Certain figures from Paolo Veronese's famous fresco decorations of the Villa Barbaro in Maser, for example, seem to suggest that the most important spectacle is not the painting, but the viewer standing in the room, for all to see: the painting itself has turned into the audience (fig. 7).[38] In art-historical literature, the so-called theatricality of Venetian sixteenth-century painting has received ample attention, but scholars have analyzed it mostly as a formal phenomenon: many similarities have been pointed out between architectural backgrounds, clothing, and composition in paintings on the one hand; and stage designs on the other.[39] Yet that paintings, just like any human being, were members of society, a society that was theatrical, has not often been noticed.

Venice

Sixteenth-century Venice makes for a particularly interesting case study. Its economy resting on international trade, Venice was engaged in all kinds of exchanges with other parts of Italy and the world, but at the same time Venetians typically liked to present themselves as literally and figuratively isolated. To achieve such an image, a possible means were the arts, which during the *Cinquecento* were practiced on a heretofore unknown level. Especially with regard to the art of painting this period was considered a milestone, not in the last place by the Venetians themselves. It was also during this period that Venice developed from a maritime power or *stato da mar* to a mainland

[38] See also Caroline van Eck and Stijn Bussels, 'The Visual Arts and the Theatre in Early Modern Europe', *Art History* 33 (2010), pp. 208-223, and further articles in the same issue.

[39] The most important studies in this direction are Marc Bayard, 'La théatralité picturale dans l'art italien de la Renaissance', *Studiolo* 3 (2005), pp. 39-57; David Rosand, 'Theater and Structure in the Art of Paolo Veronese', *The Art Bulletin* 55 (1973), pp. 217-239; also Rosand's *Painting in Cinquecento Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto*, New Haven and London 1982, later revised as *Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto*, Cambridge 1997; Michelangelo Muraro, 'Vittore Carpaccio o il teatro in pittura', in: Maria Teresa Muraro (ed.), *Studi sul teatro veneto fra rinascimento e età barocca*, Florence 1971, pp. 7-19.

state or *stato da tera*. For the Venetian nobility this meant a need to adapt, which potentially included a different kind of artistic patronage.

In the field of social history, sixteenth-century Venice has lately received considerable attention. With their valuable studies of Venetian civic ritual, Edward Muir and Iain Fenlon have done work without which this thesis would not have been possible.[40] The study of Venetian art, too, in particular Venetian painting, has expanded enormously over the past decades; and its popularity is still growing, judging from the surprising number of blockbuster exhibitions dedicated to sixteenth-century Venetian painting over the last years.[41] This thesis has benefited greatly from all this scholarship; yet at the same time it goes beyond it in the sense that it aims to make a real connection between Venetian painting and Venetian life, with a study like Manfredo Tafuri's *Venezia e il rinascimento* (1985) as an important source of inspiration because of the way it synthesizes archival materials, analyses of form and cultural and intellectual contexts into a nuanced and vivacious image of a period.[42]

To study sixteenth-century Venetian paintings in the context of the culture that produced them, and to reconstruct the social networks in which they were embedded, historical sources are needed. In general, the value of historical sources depends on the questions historians pose to them. While one would perhaps expect every period source regarding Titian and his fellow Venetian artists to have become familiar to scholars by now, this turns out not to be the case. New questions lead to a new appreciation of the avail-

[40] Muir, *Civic Ritual*; Fenlon, *The Ceremonial City*.

[41] *Giorgione*, Castelfranco Veneto, Museo Casa Giorgione, 12 December 2009 – 11 April 2010; *Titien, Tintoret, Véronèse: rivalités à Venise*, Paris, Musée du Louvre, 17 September 2009 – 4 January 2010 / *Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese: rivals in Renaissance Venice*, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 15 March – 16 August 2009; *Giovanni Bellini*, Rome, Palazzo del Quirinale, 30 September 2008 – 11 January 2009; *L'ultimo Tiziano e la sensualità della pittura*, Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia, 26 January – 20 April 2008 / *Der späte Tizian und die Sinnlichkeit der Malerei*, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 18 October 2007 – 6 January 2008; *Tiziano: l'ultimo atto*, Belluno, Palazzo Crepadona, and Pieve di Cadore, Palazzo della Magnifica Comunità, 15 September 2007 – 6 January 2008; *Tintoretto*, Madrid, Museo del Prado, 30 January – 13 May 2007; *Bellini, Giorgione, Titian and the Renaissance of Venetian painting*, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, 17 October 2006 – 7 January 2007 / Washington, National Gallery of Art, 18 June – 17 September 2006.

[42] Manfredo Tafuri, *Venezia e il rinascimento: religione, scienza, architettura*, Turin 1985; in the rest of this thesis, I refer to the English-language paperback edition: *Venice and the Renaissance*, translated by Jessica Levine, Cambridge, Mass. 1995.

able sources; new questions lead to discoveries. This thesis uses a wide range of contemporary sources; from letters, diaries, and poems to chronicles, treatises, diplomatic messages, miracle books, and judicial documents. These are sources that would be of interest to social historians, historians of literature, of ideas, of politics, religion, and of law, which makes this study, although it has a strong basis in art history, truly interdisciplinary in character. What is more, much of the material under discussion has not earlier been used to answer the kind of questions that are posed here; and a substantial amount has remained unknown and unpublished up to this day.

The main body of this thesis consists of four well documented and elaborately analyzed case studies of paintings that have elicited a large amount of responses and maintained a variety of social lives. The benefit of this approach, which we may even characterize as a type of microhistory, is that it offers the possibility to study the interactions of paintings and people to the greatest degree of detail; and it is in small details that we will find the answers to large questions.[43] This is an advantage of my thesis over existing studies in the field. In *The Power of Images* (1989), David Freedberg gathered an enormous amount of examples of images that, throughout history, were treated not as lifeless objects but as somehow living beings.[44] Although Freedberg's study served as an impetus for much further research, a detailed analysis of the way the lives of artworks come into being and develop is still much needed.[45] We may say that also Fenlon's work on Venetian civic ritual suffers a bit from its own vast scope; as Filippo de Vivo argued, it tends to overstress cultural homogeneity and harmony at the cost of situations of conflict and tension.[46] While paintings in Venice were certainly used to help create the appearance

[43] I here loosely paraphrase Charles Joyner, *Shared traditions: Southern history and folk culture*, Urbana 1999, p. 1. Renowned microhistorians such as Carlo Ginzburg, Guido Ruggiero, and Edward Muir have very fruitfully worked on Venice and the Veneto and Friuli regions. With the notable exception of Ginzburg – I think in particular of his essay 'Tiziano, Ovidio e i codici della figurazione erotica nel Cinquecento', originally published in *Paragone. Arte* 29, no. 339 (1978), pp. 3-24 – their work does not contain many references to art.

[44] David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago and Londen 1989.

[45] For a critical response to Freedberg's seminal work, see, among others, Arthur C. Danto, *The Art Bulletin* 72 (1990), pp. 341-432.

[46] Filippo de Vivo, 'Review of: Iain Fenlon, *The Ceremonial City: History, Memory and Myth in Renaissance Venice*, New Haven and Londen 2007', *European History Quarterly* 40 (2010), pp. 324-326.

of a glorious and harmonious society, as is for example the case in the Doge's Palace, as often they were involved in conflicts and political and religious strife, as we will see.

While it does not attempt to be exhaustive, this thesis more or less covers the period of a man's life, as befits a study with an anthropological basis. It starts in a time of crisis, the second decade of the sixteenth century, when Venice was slowly recovering from its almost fatal defeat in the battle of Agnadello (1509), when the plague hit the city, and when, in Europe, the Reformation took off. Thus, our narrative begins where Hans Belting's *Bild und Kult* (1990) comes to an end.[47] Belting's work on medieval images and the powers ascribed to them argued that in the time before the Reformation, God was perceived to be present in religious images; while the period we are concerned with here saw the dawn of the so-called 'era of art'. In what follows, however, I will show that in sixteenth-century Venice there was no such thing as an era of art; the changes that took place in the ways images interacted with their surroundings were rather gradual than in kind.

Our story ends some seventy years later, when Venice was again in crisis. In the early 1580s, thanks to the faction of the so-called *giovani*, the ever increasing power of the Council of Ten, one of the most powerful bodies of the Venetian state, came under attack and as a result was seriously restrained. The opposing faction of the *vecchi* would lose political dominance for time to come. As Tafuri has demonstrated, the divide between the *giovani* and *vecchi* was not only political, but also religious and cultural. As I will show as well, it were the *vecchi*, those families with the strongest ties to the Holy See, who were particularly interested in the visual arts. Thus the end of our narrative in the 1580s marks the defeat of an especially art-loving group and throws light on the role played by paintings in its struggle for power.

[47] Originally published as *Bild und Kult: eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, Munich 1990; the edition referred to in the rest of this study is *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, translated by Edmund Jephcott, Chicago 1994. For a recent assessment of Belting's influential work, see Jeffrey Hamburger, 'Art history reviewed XI: Hans Belting's "Bild und Kult: eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst", 1990', *The Burlington Magazine* 153 (2011), pp. 40–45.

Set Up of the Book

How is this thesis set up? Each of the four chapters of this study tells the story of a single painting (or in the case of chapter three, two intimately connected paintings) that had a particularly pregnant social life. Each chapter unravels an art nexus, to speak with Gell, and focuses on another element of that nexus; but as it will turn out, all nexuses are also connected, as some artists, patrons, and prototypes turn up again and again. The book is more or less structured chronologically, but now and then we will have to look forward or backwards; for in the course of the century, the social lives of paintings were subject to change; change that needs to be accounted for.

Chapters One and Two have as their subjects paintings that we would normally characterize as religious; yet as we will see, non-religious motives and effects were at least as important for the ways people interacted with these paintings. The first chapter is about the so-called *Christ Carrying the Cross*, owned by one of the largest lay confraternities or *Scuole* of the city, which from about 1520 onwards was believed to be capable of miraculously healing people. Nowadays alternatively ascribed to Giorgione or to Titian, this miraculous painting was originally venerated for whom it depicted and for the beneficent effects it had on people's health. As this chapter will show, it was only in the second half of the century that the role of the artist became fully acknowledged and that the painting started its second life as the 'miraculous' product of Titian's hand. Chapter Two tells the troubled early history of Titian's *Annunciation* altarpiece in the Cathedral of Treviso. Shortly after the installation, the donor portrait in this altarpiece was violently attacked with pitch by an anonymous assailant. This part of the book not only sheds light on the way inhabitants of the Venetian provinces dealt with art, but also analyzes the downside of the power of images: they may invoke negative responses and even destruction. Believed to offer immediate access to their prototypes, paintings in Venice and the Veneto were sometimes attacked to harm the people depicted in them. Could this practice be similar to voodoo or volt sorcery?

In Chapters Three and Four we will instead focus on paintings that do not have religious subject-matter; nevertheless, we will see that people found inspiration in religious habits and rites for the ways they interacted with these paintings. Chapter Three recounts the younger years of Irene and Emilia di

Spilimbergo and their painted portraits. The two sisters, noblewomen from Friuli, lived in Venice when one of them, Irene, suddenly died. We will investigate how their family tried to cope with this loss and the role played in this process by the painted portraits of the two young women. This part of the book will also deal with the contemporary poetic response to painting; for Irene's premature end led to a remarkable production of lyrical poetry reflecting on the power of painting to overcome death. In the fourth and last chapter, we will return to the portrait of Bianca Capello. Inside the *studiolo* of Francesco Bembo, this painting entered into a romantic relationship with its owner; but as a stand-in for the grand duchess herself, it also became involved in Venetian and Italian politics. With an analysis of this remarkable double life, we will attempt to pull everything together: the role of the artist and his design; the relation between a painting and its prototype; and the interaction between the painting and its patron and other viewers.

In this thesis, I will try to restore to these paintings the life that in our age may seem so distant, so dim. Or does it? Sometimes, academic art historians show themselves very well aware of the life power inherent in Venetian paintings. In an essay on the famous *Venus of Urbino* (fig. 8), renowned art historian David Rosand responded very critically to a colleague who in his view had reduced Titian's masterpiece to a mere prostitute: 'To call these images "mere pin-ups" can only strike us as a rather perverse form of Venus envy. […] To deny a Renaissance picture of a nude woman her mythological garb is to turn her out into the streets.'[48] Even nowadays, so much is clear, the *Venus of Urbino* is still very much alive.[49] Let us hope the same for the paintings studied over the following pages.

[48] David Rosand, 'So-And-So Reclining on Her Couch', in: Rona Goffen (ed.), *Titian's "Venus of Urbino"*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 37-62, here pp. 49-50.

[49] There are other intriguing examples of art historians enlivening paintings by practising their *métier*. See, for example, the case of Bernard Berenson, signaled by Frank Fehrenbach in '"Du lebst und thust mir nichts": Aby Warburg und die Lebendigkeit der Kunst', in: Hartmut Böhme and Johannes Endres (eds.), *Der Code der Leidenschaften: Fetischismus in den Künsten*, Paderborn 2010, pp. 124-145.

1

A Modern Miracle

Christ Carrying the Cross *in the Scuola di San Rocco*

In his *Le Maraviglie dell'arte* (1648), the seventeenth-century Venetian painter and art critic Carlo Ridolfi (1594-1658) mentioned a much venerated image of Christ, which he attributed to the most famous Venetian painter of the previous century, Titian:

> Around the same time [as he was working in the Doge's Palace], Titian made the Christ of the chapter of San Rocco, who is being pulled with a rope by a treacherous Hebrew, [a painting] which Vasari located in the life of Giorgione. Because it was painted piously, it has attracted all the City's devotion; this effect arises from devout images, which stir the faithful to frequent veneration.[1]

Indeed, in his *Lives* of 1550 Giorgio Vasari ascribed the painting to Giorgione:

[1] 'Circa lo stesso tempo oprò Titiano il Christo del capitello di San Rocco, posto dal Vasari nella vita di Giorgio, tirato con fune da perfido hebreo, che per esser piamente dipinto, hà tratto à se la divotione di tutta la Città; effetto, che proviene dalle divote imagini, che muovono i fedeli ad una frequente veneratione.' Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell'arte ovvero Le vite degli illustri pittori veneti e dello Stato* (Venice, 1648), p. 141.

> [Giorgione] made a painting of a Christ who carries the cross and a Jew who pulls him, which after some time was placed in the church of San Rocco, and today, because of the devotion that many feel for it, it performs miracles, as one can see.[2]

In the century between the publication of Vasari's and Ridolfi's works, some more authors made similar references to the painting: among others the Florentine Raffaello Borghini and the anonymous Titian biographer known as Tizianello.[3] All writers referred to one and the same object, a depiction of Christ carrying the cross and being mocked by one of his executioners that is nowadays on display in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco in Venice but was originally exposed, as the sources confirm, in that same confraternity's church (fig. 9, colour plate 1).[4] It was probably painted in or shortly before 1510 by Giorgione, by Titian, or, possibly, even by someone else – this gap in our knowledge will be discussed later on. What all the sources furthermore agree on are the great powers the painting had over its public. As they all stress, the Venetian people were deeply devoted to it and believed the image to perform miracles. Yet the two authors quoted above explain these powers very differently. For Ridolfi, they spring from the piety of the artist (*per esser piamente dipinto*), while for Vasari, the painting's miraculous powers originate from the devotion felt by the public (*per la devozione che vi hanno molti*). Their diverging

[2] 'Lavorò un quadro d'un Cristo che porta la croce ed un Giudeo lo tira, il quale col tempo fu posto nella chiesa di Santo Rocco, ed oggi, per la devozione che vi hanno molti, fa miracoli, come si vede.' Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori et architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e 1568*, eds. Paola Barocchi and Rosanna Bettarini, vol. IV, Florence 1976, pp. 45-46.

[3] Tizianello, *Breve compendio della vita di Tiziano (1622)*, ed. Lionello Puppi, Milan 2009, p. 54: 'Non è però di minor bellezza l'immagine di Cristo che porta la Croce, posta nella chiesa di San Rocco, tirato da un ebreo con la fune, che muove le lacrime ai pietosi riguardanti, poiché si vede con il pennello dottamente espresso il dolore che patì per l'umana generazione, opera anco di grandissima et antichissima divozione.' Raffaello Borghini, *Il Riposo … in cui della Pittura, e della Scultura si favella, de' piu illustri Pittori, e Scultori, e delle piu famose opere loro si fa mentione; e le cose principali appartenenti a dette arti s'insegnano* (Florence, 1584), p. 373: 'Fece [Giorgione] in un quadro Christo, che porta la Croce, e un Giudeo, che il tira, il quale fu poi posto nella Chiesa di San Rocco, e dicono che hoggi fa miracoli.' Ibid., p. 525, in a section on works by Titian: '… nella Chiesa di San Rocco, un quadro entrovi Christo, che porta la croce con una corda al collo tirata da un'hebreo, la qual opera è hoggi la maggior divotione, che habbiano i Vinitiani: laonde si può dire, che habbia piu guadagnato l'opera che il maestro.'

[4] For a historiographic review and extensive bibliography, see the catalogue accompanying the recent Giorgione exhibition in Castelfranco Veneto: Enrico Maria dal Pozzolo and Lionello Puppi (eds.), *Giorgione*, Milan 2009, in particular entry no. 49, pp. 435-438 (by Maria Agnese Chiari Moretto Wiel).

accounts raise the question, how such powers ascribed to a painting can be understood.

What was it that this painting did, precisely? The *Christ Carrying the Cross* or *Cristo portacroce*, as the painting is referred to in scholarly literature, attracted enormous amounts of visitors and became an important source of income to the confraternity. The reason for this was that it was thought to miraculously save victims of human violence. As we will see, contemporary sources claimed that the painting healed countless mortally wounded men; that it saved a baby from the jaws of a terrifying wolf; that a merchant's son who had fallen from a great height recovered because of its intervention; that thanks to the painting, two people sentenced to the gallows escaped death. Most of the time, the sources hardly distinguish between the painting in the Scuola di San Rocco and Christ himself; thus, in the capacity of miraculous healer the painting was bestowed with a person-like agency.

The *Christ Carrying the Cross* stands in a long tradition of Christian miracle-working images. The phenomenon of images performing miracles – which I would like to define as supernatural events caused by the intervention of a divine power – is generally believed to have originated in the thirteenth century and reached a peak at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries; our painting thus falls within the phenomenon's hey-day.[5] Although the scale on which miracle-working images came into being gradually diminished after the Council of Trent (1545-1563), largely because of suppression by the Roman Catholic Church, they still exist today.

Over the last decades, the miraculous image in early modern Italy has received a good deal of scholarly attention, but, unsurprisingly so, mostly from social historians rather than from those interested in art.[6] Indeed – and we will get back to this – most of these miraculous images are rather conservative or dull from an aesthetic point of view. The San Rocco *Christ Carrying the Cross*, on the other hand, has been far from neglected by art historians, as it

[5] Erik Thunø and Gerhard Wolf (eds.), *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, Rome 2004, pp. 9-14.

[6] See, for example, Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, *"Sopra le acque salse": Espaces, pouvoir et société à Venise à la fin du moyen age*, 2 vols., Rome 1992; Richard Trexler, 'Florentine Religious Experience: The Sacred Image', *Studies in the Renaissance* 19 (1972), pp. 7-41. Art-historical discussions of the topic may be found in Gerhard Wolf, *Salus Populi Romani: Die Geschichte römischer Kultbilder im Mittelalter*, Weinheim 1990, and David Freedberg, *The Power of Images*.

can be associated with some of the most outstanding artists of sixteenth-century Italy and is the result of an innovative, touching and intelligent design. Yet, art-historical research has largely focused on the painting's enigmatic genesis instead of on the remarkable devotion that befell it – which is a pity, for it is just this devotion, this enormous and intense response from the public, which makes it stand out among contemporary painting. In fact, as I will show in this chapter, the *Christ Carrying the Cross* unites in itself two domains that in later centuries would grow apart: the domain of the effective religious image, and the domain of painting as an art.

As we will see, the San Rocco *Christ* came to fulfil more than one role. It was a miraculous healer; but it was also a fundraiser; and in the second half of the *Cinquecento*, it epitomized what was seen as the 'miraculous' power of Titian's art. In what follows, we will examine the reception and production of the *Christ Carrying the Cross* and its miracles, in order to gain a better understanding of where the powers ascribed to miraculous paintings came from and how this situation developed when, during the later decades of the century, what it meant for a painting to be 'miraculous' was in itself subject to change. We will start with an outline of the painting's early history and then analyze its composition, style and iconography, or in other words, try to see what it was in the painting itself that triggered this particular response from the public. Most of this chapter, however, deals with the painting's social environment and will look at its miracles through the eyes of, alternately, the object's owners, the believers, and possible authors.

Genesis and Early History

Art historians have debated the authorship of the painting for decades. It is usually dated around the end of the first decade of the sixteenth century, when Titian was still at the beginning of his very long career, and just before Giorgione died of the plague – a ravaging epidemic swept through Venice in 1510. The two painters had in fact cooperated on some projects and, as is well-known, their styles were very similar in this period, which has not made the question of the attribution any easier. As to the painting's original patron, nothing is certain. Some scholars, among whom Jaynie Anderson, have proposed that the painting was meant to serve as altarpiece for one of the private chapels in the church of San Rocco, the *ius patronatus* of which was given to

the Scuola's *Guardian Grande* of that moment, Iacomo di Zuan, in 1508.[7] On 25 March of that year, Di Zuan had promised to adorn the chapel not only with a tomb for himself and his family but also with paintings, seats, and other furnishings. Yet other scholars have argued that there is no convincing evidence for the assumption that the *Christ Carrying the Cross* was meant as the chapel's altarpiece.[8] Vasari's statement that the painting was placed in the church 'col tempo' would confirm these doubts.[9] That the documents are silent on the painting's origins makes it likely, in my view, that it reached the Scuola as a gift.[10] The first conclusive piece of evidence of the painting's presence in the church of San Rocco, and, what is more, of the miraculous powers ascribed to it, is a passage in the chronicles written by the Venetian historian Marin Sanudo (1466-1536), who recorded on 20 December of the year 1520:

> I do not want to refrain from describing the current great surge of people towards the church of San Rocco, caused by an image of Christ who is pulled by Jews, which is on an altar, and which has performed and still performs many miracles, so that every day a great many people come.[11]

Not long thereafter we find references to the miraculous painting in documents from the Scuola's archives. By then, people had brought so many alms to the painting that the Scuola decided to use them to finance the construction of their new headquarters.[12] As we can learn from a document dated March 1521, the faithful not only brought alms, but also ex-votos; the Scuola had indeed received such an abundance of votive gifts that they could not think of anything but open a little shop and sell it again. Obviously, this was

[7] Jaynie Anderson, '"Christ Carrying the Cross" in San Rocco: Its Commission and Miraculous History', *Arte Veneta* 31 (1977/1978), pp. 186-188, here p. 186.

[8] Especially Maria Agnese Chiari Moretto Wiel, 'Il Cristo portacroce della Scuola di San Rocco e la sua lunetta', *Atti dell'Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti* 156 (1997/1998), pp. 687-732, here p. 710.

[9] See above, n. 2.

[10] See Chiari Moretto Wiel, 'Il Cristo portacroce', p. 707.

[11] 'Non voglio restar di scriver il gran concorso a la chiesie di S. Rocho al presente, per una imagine di Cristo vien tirato da zudei, è a uno altar, qual à fato et fa molti miracoli, *adeo* ogni zorno vi va asaissima zente.' Marin Sanudo, *I Diarii*, ed. Rinaldo Fulin et al., vol. XXIX, Venice 1890, p. 69.

[12] See Sanudo, as quoted above: '… si trova assa elemosine con le qual si farà la scuola bellissima.'

not primarily meant to improve their financial situation, but first and foremost 'in honour of our Lord Jesus Christ'![13] From this period onwards, the object was most likely located against one of the two pilasters framing the church's main chapel, where it stood on an altar. A first notice of the kind of miracles the painting performed was also published in this period; but we will come back to all of this in due course.

'Che muove le lacrime à pietosi riguardanti': The Painting as a Trigger of Response

In each case discussed in this study we will ask to what extent something in the image itself evoked a certain audience response. In other words, we will examine if there is anything in a certain painting's style, composition, iconography, and, taking a second step, in the way it is framed and displayed, that could make an audience react the way it has. This is only a first step in our analysis, to be sure, but an important one, which has sometimes been overlooked.[14] In the end, we will be able to say something about what kind of image was likely to act upon its audiences and, conversely, what not. Such an endeavour will provide further insight into the nature of the relation between the image and its social context.

[13] 'L'è noto a tutti et l'experientia il dimostra quante cere e statue per l'inumerabili grazie et miracholi che de continuo fa el miracoloso nostro Christo a chi se raccomanda a lui si hanno offerte per le devote persone delle qual ne son piena la giexia nostra et de continuo ne super abbunda, le qual cere et maxime le statue per esser cosa fragile de continuo se rompono, cascano, perdono in ogni parte, il che vedendo el nostro dignissimo messer Bernardo de Marin fo de messer Bortholamio, al presente guardian grando et considerando esser molto a grato al Salvator del mondo, che delle cose che li sono offerte se li habbi qualche custodia hanno parlamento con quelli della sua Bancha, et fattoli intender che, benché i suoi precessori non hanno provisto a questo, saria molto a proposito et con utile della Schuola ad honor de missier Iesu Christo essendo parso molto laudabile, ha lui messo parte in Albergo, essendo congregati alla banca al numero perfetto, che li sia dato licentia et autorità al nostro guardian grando preditto di poter levar una bottegha al confin della Schuola nostra dove meglio li pererà, tenedo per insegna la imagine et depentura de messer San Rocco per vender le cere et statue che de continuo abbunda et che se perderiano, del che la Schuola ne riceverà utile et a missier Iesu Christo se li farà cosa grata quando delle offerte sue se he haverà qualche diligentia et cura, el qual per sua grazia ne' doni vita eterna. Amen!' A.S.V., *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, *Registro delle parti*, I, 1488-1543, c. 80v. Quoted after Chiari Moretto Wiel, 'Il Cristo portacroce', p. 716.

[14] Social historians dealing with miraculous images sometimes seem to deem formal analysis irrelevant (see, for example, the afore-mentioned study by Crouzet-Pavan, *"Sopra le acque salse"*). As has been explained above, I would like to argue that the image is itself a social agent; an analysis of this agency can therefore not neglect form.

So let us now take a closer look at the *Christ Carrying the Cross* of San Rocco. The painting shows us four half-figures on a dark background. Very close to the picture plane, we see Christ, carrying his cross, and looking over his left shoulder in the direction of the beholder. His face is shown in a three-quarter view. Opposite him is an older, fierce looking man with a sharply pointed beard, seen in profile, who seems to pull Christ by a rope around his neck. Behind the two main figures there are two others: on the left a man seen on his back, his head turned to the right so that we may distinguish the idiosyncratic outline of his face, and on the right just a part of another bearded figure. In its colouring, the painting is very modest: browns, ochres, whites and greys prevail, the red drops of blood on Christ's forehead, marks left by his crown of thorns, being the most conspicuous patches of colour that are left. This, however, may be due to the deplorable condition of the work.[15]

Can we find formal qualities that would have made this painting particularly apt to be worshipped as a miracle-working object? The size of its figures, for one, would have helped. The painting itself is 68 by 88 centimetres, which makes the figures life-size. Life-size figures were an essential element of Italian painting of the period and were meant to convey the illusion of tangible presence. The painting's dark background intensifies this effect, for the figures indeed lack a space of their own; they rise up from the darkness and enter the space of the beholder.[16]

The interaction between the figures in the painting is particularly gripping. The painting represents the moment when Christ, surrounded by his executioners, is carrying his own cross to Mount Golgotha, yet all historical context is removed and the figures thus seem to stand outside of time. The beholder tries to capture Christ's gaze and identifies with this man, who is the victim of such violence and yet remains so calm and forgiving. The man pulling the rope – in the early modern sources invariably characterized as Jew or Hebrew – equally seems to try to capture the saviour's attention. Thus one

[15] See Enrico Fiorin and Lorenza Lazzarini in: Dal Pozzolo and Puppi, *Giorgione*, pp. 438-439.
[16] Thomas Puttfarken, *The Discovery of Pictorial Composition: Theories of Visual Order in Painting 1400-1800*, New Haven and London 2000, chapter 5. Regarding dark backgrounds, Puttfarken discusses the example of Caravaggio's first version of *St Matthew and the Angel* (formerly Berlin, Kaiser Friedrich Museum). The figures stand out against the darkness, 'placed not so much within the picture as above the altar' (p. 149).

might say that the interaction between the two principal figures seems to confirm the way the beholders are relating to Christ, and makes them aware of their own role in this Passion play: the Christian viewer was on the good side, with Christ. This appeal to the beholder is one of the reasons why this painting stands out among the bulk of devotional images painted in Venice at the time, and makes it worthy of a place in the canon of Italian art.

As to the composition, the *Christ Carrying the Cross* is not unique. There are many other religious paintings made around the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries sharing the close-up half-figures and the dark background; and some of these are indeed quite moving, too. Yet, as far as we know, none of these has performed any miracles.

The San Rocco painting does not seem to depict a very specific moment in Christ's Passion. In the gospels, Christ is tormented, and then he is led to Golgotha.[17] The only person mentioned in this part of the story besides Christ himself is Simon of Cyrene, who is charged to carry the cross when Christ collapses under its burden. It is possible that one of the figures in the background of the painting represents this Simon. The executioner opposite Christ, however, who pulls him at the rope, is not mentioned in any of the gospels.[18] Thus, the painting is characterized by a lack of historical detail. If it

[17] See Matthew 27,31-32; Marc 15,20-21; Luke 23,26 and further; John 19,16 and further.

[18] The executioner seems to belong to an iconographic tradition in fifteenth-century northern European images. In Italian images, on the other hand, the appearance of such a figure seems to be rare. Works by Antonello da Messina are an exception to the extent that they often show the suffering Christ with a rope around his neck. This indeed only further supports our intuition: namely that the iconography of the *Christ carrying the cross* may be connected with a northern visual tradition rather than a southern. See Gertrud Schiller, *Ikonographie der christlichen Kunst*, vol. II, Gütersloh 1968, s.v. 'Die Kreuztragung', in particular pp. 91-92. The most important study of artistic relations between Venice and the lands beyond the Alps is Bernard Aikema and Beverly Louise Brown (eds.), *Renaissance Venice and the North: Crosscurrents in the Time of Bellini, Dürer and Titian*, Milan 1999. For Antonello's images of Christ see Mauro Lucco (ed.), *Antonello da Messina: l'opera completa*, Milan 2006.

The depiction of the carrying of the cross with half-figures in close-up view seems to have become popular in Milan from the 1480s onwards, from where it spread throughout the whole northern part of the Italian peninsula via the circle of Leonardo da Vinci: Mauro Lucco, 'Sacred stories', in: David Alan Brown and Sylvia Ferino-Pagden (eds.), *Bellini, Giorgione, Titian, and the Renaissance of Venetian Painting*, New Haven 2006, pp. 99-146, here pp. 102-103 and 110. Scholars have made comparisons with several depictions of the episode by Giovanni Bellini and his workshop, as well as with a drawing by Leonardo himself, now in the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice: Pietro C. Marani, 'Leonardo e il Cristo portacroce', in: *Leonardo & Venezia*, eds. Giovanna Nepi Sciré, Pietro C. Marani, et al., Milan 1992, pp. 344-357, here pp. 344-345. These images all show Christ carrying his cross from the shoulder upwards; someti-

would have depicted a specific moment from Christ's Passion, albeit an apocryphal moment, one would expect to see Jerusalem in the background, as well as groups of bystanders. One would expect, in other words, a painting such as the one made by Jacopo Tintoretto for the Scuola di San Rocco in the 1560s (fig. 10). All these elements are obviously missing in our painting. The background is a dark blur and the identities of the two men on the sides remain uncertain. In other words, the *Christ Carrying the Cross* is what art historians like to call an *Andachtsbild*, in the sense that it isolates the close-up figures from their normal narrative context and is thus very suitable, in the words of Sixten Ringbom, to 'contemplative absorption'.[19]

An important feature of the *Christ Carrying the Cross* that should be mentioned here is the depiction of Christ's eyes. Although one should be cautious of making too much of them, the painting being in such a ruined state, it is safe to say they are turned towards the viewer, Christ's right eye looking directly out of the painting, his left eye turned slightly more away. The beholders, on their turn, try to capture the Saviour's gaze, aiming for that experience of privilege, recognizable to all of us, when the eyes of a painted figure seem to follow one wherever one goes.[20] An often recurring characteristic of the depiction of deities, the presence of these conspicuous eyes leads to a certain personification of the image, as Alfred Gell has argued; for the beholder gets the impression of being watched and thus enters into a dialogue with the image.[21] Apart from that, it is intriguing that the painting provides this feeling to all viewers at the same time, and in this way unites the public in a private encounter with the Redeemer. It is a personal experience collectively felt. In this sense, the San Rocco painting is not very different from

mes Christ watches the beholder, but in other examples he looks over his shoulders to something that is apparently outside the boundaries of the painting. See also Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting*, Doornspijk 1984, pp. 147-155.

[19] For a discussion of the concept of the *Andachtsbild*, see Ringbom, *Icon to narrative*, pp. 52-58.

[20] Nicholas of Cusa had already referred to the all-seeing eyes in this type of image and used it as a metaphor of divine omnivoyance. See his *De Visione Dei*, 'Praefatio'. This confirms he and his contemporaries were familiar with the psychological effects of images with such eyes. See Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art*, Chicago and London 1993, p. 127, also for other examples of such images. Regarding this effect of 'privilege', painting and print are fundamentally different from three-dimensional visual media such as sculpture, the aspect of which is fully dependent on the viewer's movements. Puttfarken, *The Discovery of Pictorial Composition*, p. 20 and further.

[21] Gell, *Art and Agency*, chapter 7.7.

icons and other cult images, which are characterized by their being directed frontally and centrally at the beholder, and in which the divine figures are marked by large open eyes directly gazing into those of the viewers. It should therefore come as no surprise that these eyes were invariably copied in later adaptations of the miraculous painting.

I have already mentioned the painting's deplorable state. In many places the grey ground is showing through and the structure of the canvas is clearly visible. No brushstrokes are discernable any longer. It is not at all unlikely that it was already in bad condition as early as the seventeenth century. Indeed, as Chiari Moretto Wiel remarks, the painting seems to be consumed by popular piety.[22] So much, at least, is hinted at in a document from 1621, which clearly states that the wooden altar on which the painting was standing was ruined at the time, because of the lamps that had been burning there continuously.[23] Although we have no actual evidence of people touching or kissing the painting, it is likely that they did: such behaviour is found with other paintings during the sixteenth century, as we will see in chapter four, and, indeed, it still happens today.[24] After a century of worship, the *Christ* thus must have looked worn out and old. Tizianello's characterization of the painting, published in 1622, as 'a work of the greatest and oldest (*antichissima*) devotion' only seems to underline this.[25]

[22] Chiari Moretto Wiel, 'Il Cristo portacroce', pp. 723-724.

[23] See A.S.V., *Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, *Registro delle parti*, IV, 1597-1622, c. 288: 'MDCXXI adì 2 genaro… Ritrovandosi l'altare del Cristo nella chiesa nostra dove è riposto il tabernacolo del Santissimo Sagramento tutto di legname e in molte parte di esso deturpatto, imbratatto et machiato da oglio per il continuo spander de cesendelli che atorno vi hanno atachatti, sì che rende a fatto una bruttissima vista…' Quoted after Chiari Moretto Wiel, 'Il Cristo portacroce', p. 718.

[24] See, for example, the case of the Madonna delle Carceri in Prato: in order to partake in its miraculous power, people would bring adaptations of this image in other media into contact with the 'original' in the shrine (Robert Maniura, 'The images and miracles of Santa Maria delle Carceri', in: Thunø and Wolf, *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, pp. 81-95). Pompeo Molmenti (1852-1928), politician, historian and great admirer of Venice's glorious past, noted that the ritual kissing of religious images was an old Venetian habit which was ultimately derived from Byzantium. The members of the Scuola di Sant'Orsola, Molmenti wrote, would fabricate miniature images of their patron saint on parchment (later on replaced by woodcuts) and kiss them on the saint's feast-day. After this '*bacio rituale*', the images would either be mounted on pieces of wood, where they could receive offerings, or be kept in prayer books. Pompeo Molmenti, *La storia di Venezia nella vita privata: dalle origini alla caduta della Repubblica*, vol. I, Bergamo 1927, p. 163.

[25] '… opera anco di grandissima, & antichissima divotione'. *Breve compendio della vita del Famoso Titiano Vecellio* … (see n. 3).

Although such an hypothesis is hard to substantiate, we may imagine that the Scuola di San Rocco did not interrupt this process of decay. Those places where the paint had worn off only increased the painting's attraction, for they displayed the people's devotion, thereby giving a visible shape to the object's perceived miraculous powers. One could even draw a parallel between the damaged state of the painting and the damaged body of Christ: the 'scratches' of the painting as a material object further underline Christ's suffering; they become his very real wounds and make the image ever more lifelike.

In the pages above, we have extensively analyzed the painting, but to what extent, we may ask, does it compare to other Venetian miraculous images of the time? It turns out to be not at all easy to find many such images, which may tell us something about their current valuation as artistic objects. Nonetheless, there are some extant paintings of which we know that they were deeply venerated in this period. A first example is a *Madonna and Child* enshrined in the church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli – the church was specifically built for this purpose – which was painted, we know now, in 1408 by a master named Niccolò di Pietro, and which was reported to work miracles between 1480 and 1486 (fig. 11).[26] This is a full-length depiction of the Madonna carrying her son, standing in a garden-like environment with a plain, bright red background. With its attention to decorative detail, reminiscent of the Byzantine tradition, still very much alive back then, and its moving back and forth between corporality and abstraction, it is quite representative for Venetian religious imagery from the early fifteenth century. This style remained in use for a long time, until the innovations of the Bellini brothers in the second half of the *Quattrocento*. By the 1480s, however, when the Madonna's activities as a miracle-working image were reported, it must have looked somewhat archaic.

This is even more the case for the venerated *Nikopeia* icon kept in the Basilica of San Marco (fig. 12). Part of the Venetian booty after the conquest of Constantinople in 1204, it became a miraculous cult object at least from the sixteenth century, when it was believed to be painted from life by the apostle Saint Luke and was carried around in processions.[27] Also in the church of San

[26] For an analysis of this cult, see Crouzet-Pavan, *"Sopra le acque salse"*, pp. 617-668.
[27] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p. 203 and further; Rona Goffen, 'Icon and Vision: Giovanni Bellini's Half-Length Madonnas', *The Art Bulletin* 57 (1975), pp. 487-518, here pp. 508-509.

Marco was a painted panel crucifix which began to bleed when it was stabbed in 1290. As Hans Belting has shown, this bleeding crucifix was connected to an ampulla filled with Christ's blood also preserved in San Marco and traditionally associated with the blood flowing from a crucifix in Beirut. Despite its undeniable Italian origins, the crucifix soon came to be regarded as one of the Byzantine spoils of 1204, thus being linked to an image of Christ in the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, which, according to tradition, had begun to bleed when it was stabbed by a Jew, as if it was a living person.[28] Many more references to such miraculous images can be found, for example in Francesco Sansovino's *Venetia Città Nobilissima*, but not all the images themselves seem to have survived.[29]

I have dwelt upon some of these other miraculous images in order to shed light on what I believe to be two peculiar features of the *Christ Carrying the Cross*: firstly, that it became effective a mere ten years after its most likely date of origin and, secondly, that it was unmistakably modern in its design. We don't see this with any other miraculous image that I know of, in Venice or elsewhere. Unlike the *Madonna dei miracoli*, which has only been attributed to an artist in modern times; unlike the *Nikopeia*, allegedly painted by Saint Luke; or unlike the bleeding Christ, mistakably believed to come from Byzantium, artists' names were connected to it at a time when it was still much venerated as a miraculous object. Next to that, the painting's up-to-date design seems to make it unapt to be treated the way it was: its modernity would have asked too much attention for the act of creation by a singular artist. Yet, as we will see, the situation was far more complex than we would think.

For one of its miracles, see Sanudo, *I diarii*, vol. XLVIII, p. 275, entry of 20 July 1528: 'Per esser grandissime secure et non piover, el Patriarcha ordinò procesion per le chiesie, et a San Marco fo portà atorno la piaza la Madona fata de man de San Lucha, sonando campane dopie, el dicendo le letanie, et cussì se farà per tre zorni continui.' See also the entry of 7 August of the same year: 'La matina, *Laus Deo*, piovete assà et quasi tutto il zorno; aqua molto a proposito per li megii et altri legumi et per l'uva, ch'è molti zorni *imo* mexi non ha piovesto. Si feva ogni dì procession etc. Idio ha provisto; sichè è stà tanto oro caduto dal cielo per ben di la povera gente; che Dio sia ringratiato.'

[28] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p. 195 and further.

[29] Sansovino on an image in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari: 'Vi si honora parimente il Christo miracoloso situato a mezza Chiesa, a cui piedi è sepolto quel Titiano che fu celebre nella pittura, fra tutti gli altri del tempo nostro.' Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima*, p. 66r.

So far, it seems problematic to attribute the miraculous painting's agency primarily to the way it looked. Quite similarly looking paintings were not effective, at least not in this way; other miraculous images, conversely, looked quite differently. The explanation may therefore rather be sought in the way the painting was framed and displayed; which will be examined in the next few pages.

Most likely the *Christ Carrying the Cross* has never been on view without some kind of frame. The frame in which the painting is nowadays set is a gilded, wooden tabernacle type; not uncommon for smaller religious paintings of the early sixteenth century (fig. 13).[30] On top of this frame a lunette is attached with a depiction of *God the Father with Angels Carrying the Instruments of the Passion*. When exactly was this elaborate frame conceived? In fact, it seems to have come about in several stages. The lunette is usually dated between 1519 and 1520 and may have been painted by Titian and his workshop.[31] The frame itself dates back to the same years, but originally looked much simpler. It was painted blue – even with the naked eye one can still discern remnants of this colour – and did not yet contain the floral decorations nor the columnettes on the sides. Early woodcuts after the painting seem to show the ensemble in this plain outlook. In 1527 the Scuola decided to further adorn the painting, in order to make it 'splendid and beautiful'.[32] The *Guardian Grande* or head of the Scuola Francesco di Zuan, who played an altogether important role in the promotion of the painting, as we will see, personally paid for part of these embellishments.[33] This was probably the moment when the ensemble came to look much as it does today, although some elements have been lost, most notably two eagles with spread wings who used to support the frame.[34] During the whole of the sixteenth century, the painting was located on a wooden altar attached to a pilaster framing the main chapel. Only during the seventeenth century was it moved to one of the side chapels and installed on a newly made marble altar (fig. 14).

[30] See Paul Mitchell, 'Italian Picture Frames 1500-1825: A Brief Survey', *Furniture History* 20 (1984), pp. 18-27.
[31] See Chiari Moretto Wiel, 'Il Cristo portacroce', particularly p. 723 and further.
[32] Chiari Moretto Wiel in: Dal Pozzolo and Puppi, *Giorgione*, p. 436.
[33] Chiari Moretto Wiel, 'Il Cristo portacroce', p. 717.
[34] Chiari Moretto Wiel in: Dal Pozzolo and Puppi, *Giorgione*, p. 436.

All of this suggests that the frame was growing with the painting's fame. The installation of the first frame seems to have coincided with the revelation of the painting's miraculous power. The embellishments later in the 1520s indicate the success of the painting during those years. The frame thus became a marker of the painting's miraculous power. It seems to exclaim: 'this is where you need to be!'[35]

As has been said, the Scuola di San Rocco possessed other miraculous objects, besides the painting, that it also preserved in its church. How did all these powerful things relate to each other? Chief among the miraculous objects was a processional crucifix about which we unfortunately know very little. Today, the Scuola still possesses a number of fifteenth-century crucifixes large enough to have served as processional crosses; which one of them is the miraculous one to which the sources refer is not completely certain.[36] It may be identified, however, with a late fifteenth-century wooden crucifix, 131 cm in length, which has recently been restored (fig. 15).[37] There are some archival documents mentioning the crucifix and its miracles; the first, dated 22 July 1519, expresses the need for some proper ornamentation and acknowledges the large number of visitors coming to see the object. A second document, written the same day, makes clear that the miraculous cross was used as the Scuola's *gonfalon e stendardo* and regardlessly carried around; it proposes to use two other crucifixes housed in the confraternity's church instead, like the other *Scuole* were used to do.[38]

[35] Candles and other forms of lighting will have added substantially to the effect of the golden frame; see Paul Davies, 'The Lighting of Pilgrimage Shrines in Renaissance Italy', in: Thunø and Wolf, *The Miraculous Image*, pp. 57-80.

[36] For an overview and restoration reports, see Gloria Tranquilli (ed.), *Restauri a Venezia 1987-1998*, Milan 2001, pp. 144-151; for more information on the use of processional crosses in Venice and the Veneto generally see Elisa Longo, 'Committenza, iconografia e stile nelle croci processionali del Quattrocento Veneziano', *Arte Cristiana* 90 (2002), pp. 295-302.

[37] Franco Posocco and Salvatore Settis (eds.), *La Scuola Grande di San Rocco / The Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, vol. II, Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini 2008, pp. 348-349, cat. no. 394a (by Anne Markham Schulz); Chiari Moretto Wiel, 'Il Cristo portacroce', p. 709.

[38] A.S.V., SGSR, II consegna, b. 45, c. 17v: 'Anchora l'è da proveder, che havendo el nostro santisimo chruzifixo el qual è nella nostra Cexia sopra el pilastro della chapella granda fato e fa de grandissimi miracholli da pocho tempo in qua chome manifestamente se vede de zorno in zorno, el qual è molltto vixittà dal popullo et exiam chore grandisime elemoxine, dove el bixogna de nezexsità far quallche ornamento a simel locho…'

Ibid., c. 18v: '… essendo sta levatto per li nostri predecessori per nostro confalon e stendardo el nostro glorioxo et miracholloxo Chrozefiso el qual resplende de mollti miracholli e quello continuamente se portta fora de chaxa con pocho rispetto, essendo cossa tanto degna

Probably the most famous miraculous cross in early modern Venice was the one owned by a rivalling confraternity, the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista. It possessed a processional cross housing a relic of the True Cross, which the Scuola had acquired in the fourteenth century from the chancellor of the Kingdom of Cyprus and Jerusalem, Philippe de Mézières. Several early miracles performed by this cross have been depicted by Gentile Bellini and others in the paintings which once adorned the Scuola's *Albergo* but are now in the Gallerie dell'Accademia. The importance of the cross and its relic is further underlined in Titian's *Portrait of the Vendramin Family* (London, National Gallery), which shows male members of the family venerating the relic, as it was, according to legend, a Vendramin, *Guardian Grande* of the Scuola, who once miraculously saved the relic from drowning (fig. 16). This and other miracles have also been recorded in an anonymous incunabulum titled *Questi sono imiracoli delasantissima croce delascola demisier san zuane euangelista* (c. 1481).[39] Although this booklet has gone through several revised editions, all of which date from 1590 or later, none of its versions contains miracle stories taking place after the fifteenth century, which suggests that, when the cross of San Rocco came to be regarded as miraculous, the heyday of its rival at San Giovanni Evangelista was over.[40]

che si doveria tegnir con maxima reverentia, ne fatto tanto divizia con perichollo de perder tanto texoro, maxime a le fiate per sinistro de queli el portano l'inverno a tempo de zazo e nebia; loro potria chaschar e quello franzer e spezzar, che a noi saria de grandissima nollgia e considerando noi che le altre fraterne ano do stendardi over penelli deli quali loro ne uxa uno le feste prinzipal e uno altro neli zorni continui, et però mette parte messer Francescho de Zuanne al presente nostro guardian grando, essendo alla bancha il numero perfetto, che di zettero el se abi a tor uno di queli doi chrozifixi li quali sono nela nostra cexia, i qual se debino portar ali nostri defonti, aziò non se inchora in perichollo chome di sopra è ditto, avendo liberttà el guardian da matin, quelo si troverà de tempo in tempo, poterllo portar a qualche persona degna e benefattori dela nostra Scholla chome melgio a lui parerà, e l'altro porttarlo come è ditto e chome zà alltre fiatte è stato portà…' Quoted after Chiari Moretto Wiel, 'Il Cristo portacroce', pp. 710-712 nn. 54 and 56. I agree with Jaynie Anderson and others that both these documents refer to a miraculous crucifix (cf. *el nostro santisimo chruzifixo*; *el nostro glorioxo et miracholloxo Chrozefiso*) and not, as Chiari Moretto Wiel contended, that the first would refer to the painting (see Anderson, '"Christ carrying the cross" in San Rocco', p. 187).

[39] Patricia Fortini Brown, 'An Incunabulum of the Miracles of the True Cross of the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista', *Bollettino dei Civici Musei Veneziani d'Arte e di Storia* 27 (N.S.) (1982), pp. 5-8; see also idem, *Venetian narrative painting in the age of Carpaccio*, New Haven 1988, p. 60.

[40] I have consulted editions from 1590 (Venice, Ventura Galuano); 1604 (Venice, Gio. Ant.o Rampazetto); 1617 (Venice, Antonio Pinelli); 1682 (Venice, Antonio Bosio). I would like to

Like the cross owned by the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista, the cross of San Rocco may have contained a relic from which it derived its miraculous powers. Processional crosses in general often were receptacles of relics, and the miraculous and apotropaic powers ascribed to them can be seen in connection with their precious contents.[41] As it is put in a revised edition of the *incunabulum* (1590): 'These are the miracles which have come from the crystal cross of the Scuola of St John the Evangelist, for in there is kept real wood from the Cross on which Jesus Christ suffered his Passion and his death.'[42] The cross of San Rocco in turn may have transferred its power to the painting of *Christ Carrying the Cross*.

But there were still other miraculous objects in the church which also will have played a role. The day after Easter Friday of the year 1518, the Scuola received a miraculously flowering thorn from one of its members, a certain Zuan Maria Contarini (fig. 17).[43] The thorn was believed to have come from Christ's crown of thorns, and once it had begun to flower, its owner felt he should donate it to the confraternity. The next year, the miraculous event would happen again. This was a particularly happy occasion. For not only did it take place on Easter Friday, it also happened exactly two years after the laying of the first stone of the Scuola's new building, and, last but not least, Easter Friday of that year fell on 25 March, the day of the Annunciation to Mary, which was also the legendary founding day of Venice itself. So here we have a memory of an event that is literally loaded with meaning: a relic of the *arma Christi* came to life in the week of the re-enactment of Christ's Passion; it happened on the day of the Incarnation; and it marked both the founding of the Scuola's building and of the city of Venice.[44] In this single thorn, an object only a few centimetres in size, everything came together; and in this

thank the staff of the Biblioteca del Museo Correr for kindly bringing this material to my attention.

[41] Longo, 'Committenza, iconografia e stile nelle croci processionali', p. 301.

[42] 'Questi sono li miracoli della croce di Cristallo della Scuola di M. San Zuane Evangelista proceduti, Perche in essa è del vero legno della Croce, sopra la quale M. Iesu Christo portò Passione, et morte.' *Miracoli della croce santissima della scuola de San Giovanni evangelista* (Venice: Ventura Galvano, 1590) (no page numbers).

[43] Chiari Moretto Wiel in: Posocco and Settis, *La Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, vol. II, cat. no. 385, p. 340.

[44] Chiari Moretto Wiel in: Dal Pozzolo and Puppi, *Giorgione*, p. 437.

way it embodied the Scuola's privileged relation with Christ and with the myth of the city.

During the 1520s, the thorn was annually exposed to the public on the Friday nearest to 25 March and every year in the days before Easter it was given on loan to the basilica of San Marco, where it participated in a rite on *Giovedì Santo*. This continued until 1528, when, because it had not showed miraculous activities for years on end, the thorn was stored with the Scuola's other relics.[45] Before we go on discussing the next relic, it is important to note the Christological relationship between the thorn, the crucifix, and the painting; it has even been suggested that the figure of Christ in the painting once wore a crown of thorns.[46]

The last relic that should be mentioned is the body of the Scuola's patron saint, St Roch of Montpellier. In 1486 members of the newly founded confraternity managed to abduct his complete body from its burial place in the city of Voghera in Lombardy and take it to Venice.[47] From this moment on, St Roch became the most important plague saint of the city and it was the presence of his body that soon gave the Scuola its prominence. In the 1520s, his relics were solemnly translated from one of the side chapels to the church's high altar, which had recently been completed.[48]

All in all, it seems likely that the miraculous power of the *Christ Carrying the Cross* should be understood in the light of the group of holy objects to which the painting also belonged. There are several arguments for this assumption. Firstly, those objects were active as miracle-workers first. The body of St Roch had been present from the Scuola's very beginnings; the thorn flowered in 1518 and 1519; records of the crucifix's special powers go back as far as the summer of 1519. The first secure statement regarding the painting, on the other hand, dates from the end of 1520. Secondly, all objects were located in the church, and most likely at the eastern end of the church;

[45] Chiari Moretto Wiel in: Posocco and Settis, *La Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, vol. II., cat. no. 385, p. 341.
[46] Chiari Moretto Wiel in: Dal Pozzolo and Puppi, *Giorgione*, p. 437. This would also explain for the crown's apparent absence among the tools of the Passion in the lunette.
[47] Maria Elena Massimi, 'Jacopo Tintoretto e i confratelli della Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Strategie culturali e committenza artistica', *Venezia Cinquecento* 5 (1995), pp. 5-169, here p. 52.
[48] Maria Agnese Chiari Moretto Wiel, 'Il Tesoro, gli apparati processionali e suntuari, i lasciti: ciò che fu, ciò che è', in: Posocco and Settis, *La Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, vol. II, pp. 175-191, here p. 178.

physically very close to each other and in the most sacred part of the building. Thirdly, so far nobody has been able to explain why the first miracle of the painting took place, or, in other words, why this painting suddenly changed from a 'normal' devotional image into an agent with extraordinary powers. The presence of other miracle-working objects close-by, which then would have transferred their powers to the painting, may provide us with such an explanation. Indeed, such a course of events would be very similar to the situation in the basilica of San Marco, for there, too, all miraculous objects and relics were in some way connected and transferred their powers upon each other.[49]

Adaptations

Not unusual for miracle-working images, the *Christ Carrying the Cross* generated a large number of copies in all sorts of media.[50] Rather than as mere copies, these images may more aptly be defined as 'adaptations', for hardly any image turns out to be an exact replica of its prototype. A considerable amount of these adaptations has survived, not only paintings but also versions in woodcut and even in marble (fig. 18).[51] It is likely that smaller adaptations were also produced at the time, such as amulets, candles and statuettes, but such objects are, as far as I know, no longer extant. All these images would have functioned in the pilgrimage industry, the masses trying to obtain a reproduction in print or in another humble medium, whereas the most affluent pilgrims commissioned a painted copy. We know, for example, of what was probably a copy of the miracle-working painting in the collection of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese; this copy may be identified with the relatively faithful replica of the San Rocco painting in the Galleria Nazionale in Parma.[52] To

[49] Belting, *Likeness and presence*, p. 195 and further.
[50] On cult images and their adaptions, see Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, chapter 6; for more examples, see also Thunø and Wolf, *The Miraculous Image*.
[51] For an overview see Lionello Puppi, 'Une ancienne copie du "Cristo e il manigoldo" de Giorgione au Musée des Beaux-Arts', *Bulletin du Musée National Hongrois des Beaux-Arts* 18 (1961), pp. 39-49, and also Giovanna Nepi Sciré in: *Leonardo & Venezia*, cat. no. 71, pp. 350-351, here p. 351; for a survey of the many adaptations painted by the painter Niccolò Frangipane specifically, see Bert W. Meijer, 'Niccolò Frangipane', *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte* 8 (1972), pp. 151-191.
[52] Nepi Sciré in: *Leonardo & Venezia*, p. 351; also Georg Gronau, 'Kritische Studien zu Giorgione', *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* 31 (1908), pp. 403-436, here p. 434. Lionello Puppi,

gain further insight into the nature of such adaptations, in what follows I will pay some attention to a number of them, firstly several prints, and secondly a group of paintings by the little-known north-Italian master Niccolò Frangipane.

A first print after the painting may be found on the front-page of a booklet proclaiming the painting's miracles, *Li Stupendi et maravigliosi miracoli del Glorioso Christo de Sancto Roccho Novamente Impressa*, written by a certain Eustachio Celebrino. The contents of this booklet will be discussed later on; now, we will turn to the image on the frontispiece (fig. 19). This image, a woodcut, shows the painting set in an ornate frame with a lunette on top. There is an inscription in the frame around the lunette: 'SVPER. DORSV[M]. MEVM. FABRICAVERV[N]T. PECAT[ORES].' This is the third line of Psalm 128 and can be translated as 'the sinners built upon my back'. As part of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, this line must have been well-known to large parts of the population.[53] Read in connection with the image, it is clear that the line from this psalm was read as a reference to and a prefiguration of the Passion of Christ. The inscription thus underlines what is also shown to us visually in the print, namely Christ's suffering. One thing that is interesting about it, is the fact that it is written in the first person: it is the Psalmist himself who speaks to us (we may even imagine that it is Christ). The visual representation, which is usually destined to remain dumb, thereby gets a voice. But there is more to this apparently rather unsophisticated woodcut. If we look at it a little bit better, we have to conclude it is not just a replica of the miraculous painting. It also represents the lunette on top of that painting and the tabernacle frame in which it was set.[54] Thus, the woodcut first and fore-

however, identified the copy in Parma with a painting in the Incurabili in Venice, seen by Giovanni Stringa and published in his edition of Sansovino's *Venetia Città Nobilissima et Singolare* of 1604, as well as by Marco Boschini and later by Zanetti (see Puppi, 'Une ancienne copie du "Cristo e il manigoldo"', p. 45 n. 12).

[53] The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the twelfth century onwards, often obligatory both for regular and secular clerics. Apart from that, it was at the core of books of hours, prayerbooks for laymen (see *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. William J. MacDonald, vol. VIII, Pallatine, Ill. 1981, s.v. 'Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary', pp. 854-855. This is further supported by the fact that the Little Office was printed in Italy twenty-seven times in the fifteenth, and fifty-three times in the sixteenth century (Élize Boillet, *L'Arétin et la Bible*, Geneva 2007, pp. 44-45).

[54] The version of the booklet illustrated here and the according woodcut on the frontispiece can most likely be identified with a second edition of around 1527; a first edition, no longer

most presents the miraculous painting as a material object. Here is no attempt to create an illusion of the presence of Christ; what the print aims at is to give a faithful rendering of what the miraculous, enframed object looks like, with light and shadow and all. It is an image of an image. At the same time, the perspective is constructed in such a way that the vanishing point in the part of the print representing Christ Carrying the Cross, although hard to locate precisely, seems to lie somewhere in or very close to Christ's head, and, given the fact that he is looking out of the image towards the beholder, just like he does in the painting, the viewer's eyes are drawn to those of Christ, no matter how small and constructed this woodcut is. Thus it can work as a devotional object in its own right.

The earliest known adaptation of the miraculous painting is another woodcut, this one anonymous and dated 1520 (fig. 20). Much the same things may be said of this print as has been said about Celebrino's woodcut. The print not only represents the miraculous painting, but also its frame and lunette. These two elements have a much more simple, less ornate form, though, than is the case with Celebrino. And instead of an inscription at the top of the print, there is a fictive scroll attached to its base, on which is written: 'Figura del deuotissimo et Miracoloso Christo e nella chiesia del de / uoto San Rocho di Uenetia. M.CCCCC.XX.' ('Figure of the most devout and Miraculous Christ which is in the church of the devout St Roch of Venice. 1520.'). So this print, too, is an image of the image of Christ. And again, the painting's frame partially falls outside the picture plane, so that the status of the print as a mere image receives further stress. What sets this early adaptation apart are its notable dimensions and its overall quality. While Celebrino's woodcut needed to fit onto an octavo and measures therefore a mere 7,9 x 6 cm – it is a miniature, really – the woodcut of 1520 is 39,4 x 27 cm large. This is more than the size of a big computer screen. The effect of this print, accordingly, is very different. The figures, furthermore, particularly those of the scene containing Christ, have volume, they are drawn with delicacy, and a fairly subtle chiaroscuro has been applied. Around Christ's head shines a

extant, would have been published around 1523-24. To what extent the painting's frame in the woodcut reflects the actual frame of around 1527 is uncertain (Chiari Moretto Wiel in: Dal Pozzolo and Puppi, *Giorgione*, pp. 483-484). There are a number of differences between the frame as it looks today and the one shown in Celebrino's woodcut: there is no inscription in the actual frame, while the columnettes are lacking in the print.

bright light, standing out in stark contrast to the cruel thorns of his crown. His gaze, once again turned towards the viewer, arouses pity and sorrow. This print, in sum, is a small 'altarpiece on paper', perfectly apt to be affixed to a wall or piece of furniture, where it could make the divine present, also in the houses of the less well-to-do believers.[55] It brings the Passion of Christ into the home but, at the same time, provides a link with another, more prestigious image, that in the church of San Rocco; and along with it, or so it was hoped, its miraculous powers.

The last print that should be discussed in this context is also the most complex one, and, I believe, the most beautiful. It shows the Scuola's patron saint, St Roch, protector of plague victims, leaning against a rock, his left leg bared so as to show the beholder the mark left by the terrible disease (fig. 21). On the saint's right, we can just see a dog walking into the picture's frame, carrying a piece of bread; the skyline of the city of Venice is in the background. In a powerful contrapposto, the saint is looking over his shoulder to the angel in the sky, who is at once greeting him and pointing upwards to a heavenly vision. It is in this vision that the complexity of the image becomes apparent, for, more than just a straightforward depiction of a popular saint, this woodcut is a multilayered representation of an altarpiece.[56]

Indeed, the central scene with St Roch is embedded in a fictional structure, flanked by narrative scenes from the saint's life. On the *predella* is inscribed a Latin text, pointing to the function of the print to work as a fundraiser for the construction of the Scuola di San Rocco's new building. Leaning against the altar is a votive tablet, showing in a simple manner how St Roch appears in a vision to a sick and praying believer. On the predella's left we see an alms box – 'alms for the construction,' the inscription says – and a child's head, an *ex voto* to thank the saint for one of his healing miracles. Just as these three objects – the head, the box, the tablet – the vision in the upper part of the image protrudes into the beholder's space; a shared vision, equally perceptible to us and the saint. The vision is the reason I discuss this print here, for it obviously is an explicit reference to the miraculous painting of *Christ Carrying the Cross*. Traditionally ascribed to Titian, who is supposed to

[55] See David Rosand and Michelangelo Muraro (eds.), *Titian and the Venetian Woodcut*, Washington, D.C. 1976, p. 10, for the popular use of early woodcuts in general.
[56] Rosand and Muraro, *Titian and the Venetian Woodcut*, pp. 108-111, cat. nos. 12A-12B.

have designed it in 1523 or 1524, the woodcut is at the same time a devotional image functioning in the world of popular piety, and the artist's comment on such images and their miraculous nature.

Indeed, Titian here takes the genre of the religious woodcut one step further, by openly exhibiting several manifestations of the religious image's agency, while creating an altarpiece that never existed. His print shows the image as vision – which, as we will see, also played a part in the miracles the painting was said to perform; the image as votive gift, or offering to a saint; the image as fundraiser, or stimulus for donating money to its owner, to which we will also return; and the image as safeguard against evil.[57]

Among adaptations of *Christ Carrying the Cross*, there is a sub-group of painted copies made by a relatively little-known north Italian artist, Niccolò Frangipane (documented 1563-1597). Frangipane painted at least nine versions of this scene; the central figures in all of them have been derived from the San Rocco *Christ*.[58] In his religious output, Frangipane worked in a remarkably archaic style and had a reproductive approach; and in his non-religious works, too, he relied heavily on the work of the earlier Venetian masters such as Titian and Giorgione.[59]

Let us take a closer look at one of Frangipane's paintings. The work I would like to discuss is a *Christ Carrying the Cross* scene with seven figures,

[57] It has often been noted that the central figure of St Roch is very similar to Titian's fresco of St Cristopher in the Doge's Palace: see, for example, Rosand and Muraro, *Titian and the Venetian Woodcut*, p. 110. Indeed, the stylistic similarity between the two figures is the most important argument for ascribing the woodcut to Titian and for dating it in this period. The *Christopher* was commissioned by Doge Andrea Gritti soon after his election, and painted right above the entrance to the Doge's private apartments. Just like the figure of St Roch, the boldly painted *Christopher* has been situated in the Venetian lagoon with the Bacino San Marco in the background. This feature provides the fresco with its political meaning: for Christopher has been depicted as protector of the lagoon and the city against military threats; a need of which Doge Gritti was more than aware, having been leading the Venetian troops during the almost fatal battle of Agnadello (1509). But St Christopher was also widely believed to offer a day of protection to those who saw him first thing in the morning; it will therefore be no coincidence that Titian has painted him so that the Doge would see him when leaving his private space. I believe we should not underestimate the actual powers ascribed to images like these; or the real fears – be they related to the Republic as a whole or to the person of the Doge – that this *Christopher* was meant to expel.

[58] Meijer, 'Niccolò Frangipane', pp. 159-161.

[59] Meijer, 'Niccolò Frangipane', pp. 159-163.

nowadays in the collection of the Museo della Città in Rimini (fig. 22).[60] As in its Venetian prototype, we see Christ from the left, his body slightly turned towards the viewer. But unlike in the earlier painting, Christ is wearing a bright red garment; his neck and elegant face are covered in drops of blood from the thorny crown on his head. His eyes, appealing to the viewer, are red with crying. On his right shoulder, his cross; around his neck, a rope, apparently held by the bearded man opposite him, who again reminds us of the painting in Venice: his crooked nose, his partially naked upper body, his age are all the same. Around those two central figures, there are five others: grotesque, uncivil looking men, wearing strange hats, laughing at Christ and pulling his clothes. The figures are all shown from their waists up – except for the dwarf on the lower right; the background seems to show the shadow of a sixth bystander, but for the rest remains dark and empty.

Thus, the painting in Rimini is a variation on the canvas of San Rocco, painted more than half a century earlier. It is also almost completely identical with a similar scene by Frangipane, nowadays in the Museo Civico in Udine, signed and dated 1572 (fig. 23).[61] And it shows very strong parallels with a number of other works with the same theme, also by Frangipane. Not all of these paintings need directly be based on the painting of San Rocco. Indeed, it seems more likely that Frangipane sometimes worked from prints, for example the woodcut discussed above, dated 1520 (fig. 20). There are a number of formal features that his paintings share with this print but not with the San Rocco *Christ*.[62] Thus, Frangipane's *Christ Carrying the Cross* paintings could be further removed from their source of inspiration than we might think.

Let us look at them again. The paintings are stuffed with figures, but there is hardly any suggestion of depth. The folds in the garments look like stone; the faces and bodies of the bystanders are awkward and ugly. As Bert Meijer remarks, only the colours and variety of the costumes enliven the otherwise static compositions.[63] If we would have to name the principal differences between Frangipane's painting in Rimini and its miraculous prototype in Venice, we could point to the rather static composition and drawing which

[60] Formerly Collection Giov. Sesto Menghi, Rimini. See also Meijer, 'Niccolò Frangipane', cat. no. A 4, p. 177.
[61] Meijer, 'Niccolò Frangipane', cat. no. 8, pp. 171-172.
[62] Meijer, 'Niccolò Frangipane', p. 160.
[63] Meijer, 'Niccolò Frangipane', p. 160.

seems to be compensated for by the colourful and exotic clothes; and the naturalistic depiction of Christ's suffering, whose face is covered in blood, sweat and tears.

Overall, Frangipane's debt to the painting of San Rocco is undeniable, and in this context it is interesting to note that in almost all his religious works his dependence on the work of Titian is apparent; so much so that an apprenticeship with this master does not seem impossible.[64] Yet how to understand the retrospective tendency visible in his works? How to understand what I would like to qualify as the *archaism* of his *Christ Carrying the Cross* paintings? It is at least certain that his adaptations fit in very well with certain ideas on the art of painting voiced by Giovanni Andrea Gilio and other writers of the Counter Reformation. Criticizing the way the painters of his time represented Christ, Gilio, a contemporary of Frangipane, addressed '[the painters] who do not know or do not want to know how to express the deformity evident in [Christ] at the time of the Passion [...]. It would be a stronger inducement to devotion to see him bloody and misshapen, than to see him beautiful and delicate.'[65]

Now that we have seen a number of adaptations of the *Cristo portacroce* of San Rocco, both in painting and in print, it is time to take stock. For example, which of the painting's formal qualities are copied, and which are changed? Indeed, it turns out that the figure of Christ with his face turned towards the viewer is always maintained, as is the interaction with the figure of the executioner. What is more, adaptations in print show a frame around the painting and a lunette, thereby apparently stressing the nature of the image as a material object. The painting's style, on the other hand, which was very much up-to-date at the moment of production, is not copied: prints after the painting vary from artful and detailed to simple and naive; painted

[64] Meijer, 'Niccolò Frangipane', pp. 162-163. For Frangipane's relation to Titian see also Giorgio Tagliaferro and Bernard Aikema, with Matteo Mancini and Andrew John Martin, *Le botteghe di Tiziano*, Florence 2009, p. 357, and Caterina Furlan, 'Tiziano nella storiografia artistica friulana tra Sette e Ottocento', *Studi tizianeschi* 3 (2005), pp. 89-96, here p. 91.

[65] 'Un altro abuso anco io trovo circa la persona del nostro Salvatore, il quale non par che ammendare si sappia: et è questo, che non sanno o non vogliono sapere isprimere le defformità che in lui erano al tempo de la passione […]. Molto più a compunzione moverebbe il vederlo sanguinolento e difformato, che non fa il vederlo bello e delicato.' Gilio, *Dialogo nella quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de' pittori*, p. 39. Translation from Alexander Nagel (*Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, Cambridge 2000, p. 158), who has many interesting things to say about archaism in sixteenth-century Italian art, and about its relation to religious reform.

adaptations are often in an archaizing style. Thus it would seem that the painting's composition rather than its style was deemed decisive; that it was the composition that identified the prototype in the adaptations.

But what about the adaptations and the painting's miraculous power? In order to answer this question we will make a small theoretical excursion. The relation between the cult image and its reproductions has been examined by David Freedberg. Freedberg proposes a critical revision of Walter Benjamin's concept of the aura of the unique prototype and its diminution as a result of reproduction.[66] Contrary to Benjamin, he argues that reproduction leads to a power and efficacy that may come quite close to that of the prototype; in Freedberg's view, repetition through reproduction 'engenders a new and compelling aura of its own'.[67] But what does reproduction do to the prototype itself?

In his *Wahrheit und Methode* (1960), Hans-Georg Gadamer discusses the relations between what he calls the 'Bild' (the work of art or picture) and the 'Urbild' (original, prototype).[68] According to Gadamer, Bild and Urbild are on a par; the Bild has a reality of its own. 'That the picture has its own reality means the reverse for what is pictured, namely that it comes to presentation in the representation. It presents itself there.'[69] So the relation between Bild and Urbild is two-sided: the two interact. Gadamer also writes: '… it is only through the picture (Bild) that the original (Urbild) becomes the original (Ur-bild: also, ur-picture) – e.g., it is only by being pictured that a landscape becomes picturesque.'[70] Gadamer's idea that the world does not exist in itself as it exists in the Bild, is illuminating. When we apply his words to our historical material, it follows that adaptations of cult images are not just passive

[66] As put forward in the famous essay *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (1936).

[67] Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, p. 126.

[68] See Frank Ankersmit's discussion of Gadamer's ideas on art and their connection to his larger project of dealing with experience and truth in the humanities, in *Sublime Historical Experience*, Stanford 2005, pp. 199-210.

[69] 'Daß das Bild eine eigene Wirklichkeit hat, bedeutet nun umgekehrt für das Urbild, daß es in der Darstellung zur Darstellung kommt. Es stellt sich selbst darin dar.' Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, Tübingen 1975, p. 133. The English translation is from Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, London 2004, p. 135.

[70] 'Denn strenggenommen ist es so, daß erst durch das Bild das Urbild eigentlich zum Ur-Bilde wird, d.h. erst vom Bilde her wird das Dargestellte eigentlich bildhaft.' Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 135; English translation from Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 136.

reflections of their prototypes; they interact with them. All adaptations in the end again affect their prototypes.

Rephrased in the terms used by Alfred Gell, a prototype only becomes a prototype when its agency can be 'abducted from an index'; in other words, when it is depicted in paintings or other images.[71] The original prototype in our case, Christ, only takes up his role (as prototype) once he is depicted in images. The Byzantines already understood this quite well when they considered images of Christ to be evidence of his human existence on earth.[72] The miraculous *Christ Carrying the Cross*, an index of Christ, in turn became a prototype once it was reproduced and adapted. And even some of these adaptations in turn became prototypes, as we have seen in the case of Frangipane. This is potentially a process without end. What it shows us is a fine example of agency through, what Gell has coined, 'distributed personhood': through the distribution of visual adaptations, or 'secondary images,' the agency of a prototype is effectively duplicated and spread.[73]

The Scuola di San Rocco and the Initiators of the Cult

In the preceding part of the chapter, we have studied to what extent the form of the miraculous painting itself will have determined the way people responded to it. We have furthermore considered the role played by the other relics and sacred objects owned by the Scuola and analyzed derivate images and their share in spreading the cult. So far, it may therefore seem that the cult of the San Rocco *Christ* was something solely effected by, and reflected in, other images. And indeed, it sometimes seems as if the Scuola would rather have had it this way. Yet, the ultimate recipients of all these images were people, and they were also people who stood at the basis of the cult. It is this group of people that we will turn to in the second part of this chapter: who were they and what were their motives in acting the way they did?

[71] Gell, *Art and Agency*, pp. 13-16 and 25-26.

[72] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p. 152 and further. See Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 134: 'In der Menschwerdung Gottes erblickten [die griechischen Väter] die grundsätzliche Anerkennung der sichtbaren Erscheinung und gewannen damit für die Werke der Kunst eine Legitimation. Man darf wohl in dieser Überwindung des Bildverbots das entscheidende Ereignis sehen, durch das die Entfaltung der bildenden Künste im christlichen Abendland möglich wurde.'

[73] For distributed personhood, see Gell, *Art and Agency*, particularly chapter 7.

Before turning to those allegedly healed by the painting and, later on, to the artist, we will first address the Scuola di San Rocco and its members. What kind of attitude did the confraternity adopt towards the miraculous painting? Which of the Scuola's members took an interest in it, and why? In this context, two names have been mentioned by other authors. The first we have already seen: Iacomo di Zuan, *Guardian Grande* in 1508, who received the right to decorate one of the two side chapels of the Scuola's church and to have himself buried there.[74] It has often been supposed that he commissioned the *Christ Carrying the Cross* as an altarpiece to this chapel, yet, as other scholars have shown, there is no evidence to support such a claim.[75] And even if there was, it would still be uncertain if Iacomo di Zuan himself had anything to do with the cult business. A second name is that of Francesco di Zuan, who was mentioned in relation to the embellishment of the painting's frame.[76] Who was this man? Why was he interested in this miraculous object? And was he the only one to bother?

But first a few general remarks on the confraternity and its origins. The Scuola Grande di San Rocco was created from a merger of two smaller confraternities, one of which assembled at San Giuliano, directly behind Piazza San Marco, and the other in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari. It was founded in 1486, when it took up its residence on a piece of land owned by the Frari, immediately adjacent to the Franciscans' church, and was elevated to the ranks of the *Scuole Grandi* that very year (fig. 24). The members rapidly started to build their own church – quite a rare thing for a Scuola – as well as a small club house, the so-called *Scuoletta*.[77] As we have seen, it was in this same year that they had managed to abduct the complete body of their patron saint, St Roch, from its burial place in the city of Voghera in Lombardy and take it to Venice.[78]

[74] Anderson, '"Christ carrying the cross" in San Rocco', p. 186.
[75] Chiari Moretto Wiel, 'Il Cristo portacroce', p. 710.
[76] See Chiari Moretto Wiel in: Dal Pozzolo and Puppi, *Giorgione*, p. 437.
[77] For the special relation of the Scuola di San Rocco to its own church, see Massimi, 'Jacopo Tintoretto e i confratelli della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', p. 52 and further.
[78] See Massimi, 'Jacopo Tintoretto e i confratelli della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', p. 52 and n. 112.

Especially this last feat immediately gave the Scuola an advantage over the other *Scuole Grandi*, which only possessed partial relics of their patron saints.[79] But the Scuola di San Rocco also had to keep an eye on its neighbours: residing in an area so dense with churches, and basically living in the shadow of the powerful Frari, its position was far from secure. Indeed, all through the sixteenth century the brothers were engaged in strife, especially with the Frari mentioned before, but also with the church of San Tomà, to which parish they belonged, and the church of San Pantalon, which sold them some land, but at the same time felt threatened by its neighbour's growing presence and popularity.[80]

It was in this particularly difficult situation that members of the Scuola were trying to strengthen the position of their young institution. The question now is: who were they? In what follows, we will investigate the roles of three men: besides the afore-mentioned Francesco di Zuan, these are Bernardo di Marin and Nicolò dalla Croce.[81]

Bernardo di Marin was a son of Bortolamio di Marin, a *drapier* or silk trader and manufacturer who had been joining the governing ranks of the Scuola right from the start: as early as 1489, he was elected *Guardian Grande* and as such he was the one to reach an agreement with the neighbouring Frari on reciprocal duties and rights.[82] In that same year, he obtained the *ius patronatus* of one of the two side chapels of the confraternity's church – which at that time still had to be built – but lost it again in 1494, when he was again *Guardian Grande*, probably because it had become the temporary resting-place of the body of St Roch.[83] In 1507, however, it was returned to the family in the person of Bortolamio's son Bernardo, with whom we are here concerned. Bernardo took on several positions in the Scuola's *Banca* (the principal gov-

[79] Adriano Prosperi, 'Solidarietà e prestigio: La Scuola di San Rocco', in: Posocco and Settis, *La Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, vol. II, pp. 9-22, here p. 17.
[80] Franco Tonon, *La Scuola Grande di San Rocco nel Cinquecento attraverso i documenti delle sue Mariegole*, Venice 1999, pp. 10-17. For the conflict with San Pantalon in particular see also Adriano Aymonino, 'La *Pala di San Pantalon*: immagine devozionale e manifesto politico', *Venezia Cinquecento* 15 (2005/2006), pp. 159-200.
[81] To find these men, I have made grateful use of Maria Elena Massimi's 'Indice alfabetico dei confratelli di governo della Scuola Grande di San Rocco, 1500-1600' (in: idem, 'Jacopo Tintoretto e i confratelli della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', pp. 109-169.
[82] Massimi, 'Jacopo Tintoretto e i confratelli della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', pp. 49-50.
[83] Chiari Moretto Wiel in: Dal Pozzolo and Puppi, *Giorgione*, p. 436; Giuseppe Tassini, *Cittadini veneziani*, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, ms. P.D. c 4, vol. III, c. 175.

erning body, consisting of the *Guardian Grande*, the *Vicario*, the *Guardian da Matin*, and the *Scrivano*) before being elected *Guardian Grande* in 1521. Apart from that, he was chosen *procuratore alla fabbrica* in 1516 and served uninterruptedly in that position until 1524.[84] This meant that he was one of the members overseeing the construction of the Scuola's new building, a process which will prove to be intimately connected with our miraculous painting. As *procuratore*, he held the opinion that the new building should become sober and simple, the way it was originally designed by *proto* Pietro Bon.[85] This had everything to do with his view on the Scuola itself: according to him, this should be a traditional confraternity, turned in upon itself, aiming first and foremost at devotional practices and charity.

Not so with Francesco di Zuan. This man, fully known as Francesco di Zuan dalla seda or, italianized, Francesco di Giovanni della seta, came from a Tuscan family of silk merchants. It was his family member Iacomo – a brother, perhaps – who, as *Guardian Grande*, obtained the *ius patronatus* of the other side-chapel to the choir of San Rocco, the so-called Cappella della Croce.[86] Francesco started his administrative career within the Scuola in 1506, and, after entering the *Banca* as *Vicario* in 1516, was elected to the highest office in 1519. He was again *Guardian Grande* in 1527.[87] Just like Bernardo di Marin, and in fact even more so, he was involved in the construction of the Scuola's new building. He, too, was elected *procuratore alla fabbrica* in 1516, and before that had already played a part in the acquisition of new land, but unlike Marin, he was not satisfied with *proto* Bon's original plans.[88] His great knowledge of construction and building was again acknowledged when he was elected in 1520 (*more veneto*) as *procuratore alla chiesa*, but also beyond the

[84] Gianmario Guidarelli, 'La fabbrica della Scuola Grande di San Rocco (1517-1560)', in: Posocco and Settis, *La Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, vol. II, pp. 43-64, here pp. 47-49.
[85] Gianmario Guidarelli, 'Sante Lombardo e la costruzione della facciata meridionale della Scuola Grande di San Rocco a Venezia, 1524-1527', *Venezia Cinquecento* 14 (2004/2005), pp. 5-221, here p. 8.
[86] Chiari Moretto Wiel, 'Il Cristo portacroce', pp. 708-709; both for Iacomo and Francesco see also Tassini, *Cittadini veneziani*, vol. V, c. 152.
[87] Massimi, 'Jacopo Tintoretto e i confratelli della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', p. 166.
[88] Guidarelli, 'La fabbrica della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', p. 47; idem, 'Sante Lombardo e la costruzione della facciata meridionale della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', pp. 19-20.

boundaries of the Scuola di San Rocco, as *procuratore alla fabbrica* of the church of Spirito Santo.[89]

Francesco di Zuan believed that the Scuola's new building should be grand and splendid, triumphalist and majestic, and therefore he proposed, early in the 1520s, some significant changes both to the exterior and the interior of the building.[90] Clearly a powerful figure in the confraternity in these years, Di Zuan won support. But not from everyone: there remained a faction, with Bernardo di Marin as its main spokesman, which wanted to stick to the building as planned. Indeed, as one author puts it, this was not just a conflict over a staircase: the self-presentation of the Scuola was at stake.[91] Another even goes as far as speaking of an 'identity crisis': from a devotional brotherhood, based on the evangelical principles of poverty and charity, the Scuola di San Rocco – and the other *Scuole Grandi*, too, to a certain extent – became more and more an extension of the Venetian government, or, as Francesco Sansovino wrote, 'almost a Republic': an outgoing, wealthy and popular organization.[92] It may be clear by now that not every member was happy with this development; yet Francesco di Zuan was one of its most fervent supporters. After a struggle that lasted for years, his faction finally triumphed: in 1527, not coincidentally the year when Francesco became *Guardian Grande* for a second time, a new *proto* was appointed. Antonio Abbondi, known as il Scarpagnino, was, together with Jacopo Sansovino, the most important architect of Venice of his time, and responsible for both the Palazzo Ducale and Rialto; and it was Scarpagnino who, we know now, would largely determine the face of the Scuola's new building.[93]

Nevertheless, Francesco di Zuan seems to be a contradictory figure. Propagating this movement away from a sober confraternity aiming at the

[89] Guidarelli, 'Sante Lombardo e la costruzione della facciata meridionale della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', pp. 19-20.
[90] Guidarelli, 'La fabbrica della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', p. 47.
[91] Guidarelli, 'La fabbrica della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', p. 47.
[92] Guidarelli, 'Sante Lombardo e la costruzione della facciata meridionale della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', p. 7. The concept of the 'small Republic' or 'piccola Repubblica' originally came from Gaspare Contarini, the Venetian diplomat and mythographer of the Venetian state. See also Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima*, p. 99v: 'Percioche oltre che sono copiosamente fornite d'argenti, di paramenti, di sacrosante reliquie, et di altre cose appartenenti al culto di Dio, rappresentano anco un certo modo di governo civile, nel quale i cittadini, quasi in propria Rep. hanno i gradi et gli honori secondo i meriti, et le qualità loro.'
[93] Guidarelli, 'La fabbrica della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', p. 56.

evangelical ideals of poverty and charity, he was at the same time involved in a religious movement that advocated precisely these ideals. We know that he had relations with, and probably even held an administrative position in, the newly founded Ospedale degli Incurabili, which was visited by the later saint Gaetano Thiene.[94] In 1524, Thiene was one of the founding fathers of the Theatine Order – with, among others, the later Pope Paul IV Carafa – which stood for church reform and a return to the primitive apostolic rule, and which was about to become one of the driving forces behind the Counter Reformation. Francesco di Zuan personally knew this Gaetano Thiene. We know furthermore that other members of his family, too, were taking an interest in church reform and evangelism current in northern Italy in these years.[95]

Before we return to the miraculous *Christ*, a third man needs to be introduced, the *orese* or goldsmith named Nicolò dalla Croce. Dalla Croce first entered the government of the Scuola in 1520, the beginning of an illustrious administrative career: he would join the ranks of the governors no less than eighteen times and also served as *Guardian Grande* (this was in 1548).[96] He was buried in 1567 in the church of San Salvatore, which may tell us something about the sort of milieu he lived in and the prestige he enjoyed.[97] Documents prove that he, too, served as *procuratore alla fabbrica*; he indeed seems to have been the main financial supervisor active in the years when

[94] Guidarelli, 'Sante Lombardo e la costruzione della facciata meridionale della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', p. 20; for the administrative position, see Emmanuele Antonio Cicogna, *Delle inscrizioni veneziane*, vol. V, Venice 1842, p. 308, who quotes Sanudo, *I diarii*, vol. XXXVIII, p. 140-141; see also Tassini, *Cittadini veneziani*, vol. V, c. 152. It is remarkable that several seventeenth-century authors mention a painting that represented Christ carrying the cross and was hanging over a door in the church of the Incurabili. Thus, Giovanni Stringa mentioned in his edition of Sansovino's *Venetia città nobilissima*: 'Vi è un quadro bellissimo di Christo, portante la Croce al Monte Calvario, sopra la porta nel fianco sinistro del famoso Giorgione.' Francesco Sansovino, *Venetia citta nobilissima et singolare descritta gia in 14. libri et hora con molta diligenza corretta, emendata, e piu d'vn terzo di cose nuoue ampliata*, ed. Giovanni Stringa (Venice, 1604), p. 193. Art historians assume the painting in the Incurabili to have been a copy of the canvas at San Rocco. See above, n. 52.

[95] Guidarelli, 'Sante Lombardo e la costruzione della facciata meridionale della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', p. 20. For more information on the Ospedale and its relation with Thiene, see also Bernard Aikema and Dulcia Meijers, *Nel regno dei poveri: Arte e storia dei grandi ospedali veneziani in età moderna 1474-1797*, Venice 1989, p. 131 and further.

[96] Massimi, 'Jacopo Tintoretto e i confratelli della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', p. 125.

[97] Tassini, *Cittadini veneziani*, vol. II, c. 132. On San Salvatore see also Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, chapter 2.

Francesco di Zuan was the brains behind the building operation.[98] What makes Dalla Croce even more interesting, and what has heretofore never been linked up with his administrative tasks, is that he also served the Scuola in a completely different capacity: as an artist.

So far, Di Marin, Di Zuan, and Dalla Croce seem to have one striking thing in common: they were all involved in the construction of the Scuola's new building. Yet what is the relation, if any, between this building and the miraculous painting? To begin with, there is the relic of Christ's real crown of thorns – its importance for our understanding of the cult of the painting has been discussed above. When it flowered on 25 March 1519, that is, on the day of Christ's crucifixion, on the founding day of the Republic of Venice, and, what is more, during the *Guardianato* of Francesco di Zuan, it was also precisely two years after the laying of the first stone of the new building.

Then, there is a lot of evidence that highlights the role the *Christ* played in funding the Scuola's headquarters.[99] When Marin Sanudo mentioned the success of the miraculous painting in his *Diaries*, he did not forget to note its favourable effects on the confraternity's finances. A part of his remarks was already quoted above (see page 35), but I will now quote the full passage:

> I do not want to refrain from describing the current great surge of people towards the church of San Rocco, caused by an image of Christ who is pulled by Jews, which is on an altar, and which has performed and still performs many miracles, so that every day a great many people come. One comes across countless alms there, with which the Scuola will be made very beautiful.[100]

A next indication may be found in Titian's extraordinary woodcut, discussed on page 52, which depicts a fictive altarpiece with the figure of St Roch, who in a vision sees the miraculous painting, and before which is represented

[98] Guidarelli, 'Sante Lombardo e la costruzione della facciata meridionale della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', pp. 24 and 67.

[99] Again I am relying gratefully on the work of Chiari Moretto Wiel, who has brought a lot of this evidence together.

[100] 'Non voglio restar di scriver il gran concorso a la chiesie di S. Rocho al presente, per una imagine di Cristo vien tirato da zudei, è a uno altar, qual à fato et fa molti miracoli, *adeo* ogni zorno vi va asaissima zente, si trova assa elemosine con le qual si farà la scuola bellissima.' Sanudo, *I diarii*, vol. XXIX, p. 69.

a little box with an inscription: 'alms for the construction' (fig. 21). Then, in a document from 1527, the year of Francesco di Zuan's second term as *Guardian Grande*, it is said that, thanks to the miraculous painting, the chaplain has 'struck gold' (*un pozzo d'oro*).[101] That one was thinking of this money in direct relation to Di Zuan's ambitious building programme is extremely likely. Our most eloquent source, however, is Francesco Sansovino, who wrote in his *Venetia Città Nobilissima*:

> They made the face of their confraternity completely encrusted with the noblest marbles and rich with ornaments, resulting in incredible costs. Yet of great help was, many years ago, the image of Christ painted by Titian, which, because it performed various miracles, was visited with lavish alms and gifts, not only from all over Venice, but also from the cities in the neighbourhood.[102]

To contemporaries, as this short survey shows, the miraculous painting of *Christ Carrying the Cross* and the construction of the Scuola's new building were directly and practically related: the painting worked as a fundraiser.

Given his propagation of a majestic and opulent building, very different from the original design by Pietro Bon, but very similar to the eventual result as described by Sansovino, Francesco di Zuan is the first person whose role in all of this we should examine more closely. For it were mostly his plans that resulted in the huge costs of which Sansovino is talking; tapping this new source of money that was the miraculous painting of *Christ Carrying the Cross* was therefore, so it seems, completely in his own interest. From his first year as *Guardian Grande*, 1519, there are a number of relevant documents. Two

[101] A.S.V., Scuola Grande di San Rocco, II consegna, b. 45, cc. 55v-56r, quoted after Chiari Moretto Wiel in: Dal Pozzolo and Puppi, *Giorgione*, p. 437. See also below, p. 77, for a remark with similar import made by Giorgio Vasari.

[102] 'Fecero p[er] ta[n]to la faccia della loro fraterna tutta incrostata di nobiliss[imi] marmi et ricca di ornamenti, con incredibil spesa. Alla qual cosa fare gli aiutò grandemente, molti anni sono l'Imagine di Christo dipinta da Titiano, la quale facendo diversi miracoli, fu frequentata con amplissime limosine et doni, non pur da tutta Venetia, ma anco dalle circonvicine città.' Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima*, p. 102v. The connection between miracles and money was stressed by Giovanni Stringa when he revised Sansovino's guidebook: 'Oltre il maggiore vi sono altri 7. altari; tra questi è assai notabile, et famoso quello di Christo Signor Nostro posto a man manca immediate fuori di essa cappella, per la qual benedetto, e Santa Imagine, che fu dipinta dal gran Titiano, s'è fatta ricca, et questa Chiesa, et la fraterna insieme maravigliosamente, havendo fatto essa Imagine infiniti miracoli.' Sansovino, *Venetia citta nobilissima*, ed. Giovanni Stringa, p. 161r.

decrees dated 22 July, also mentioned above, name 'Francesco di Zuan at present our *Guardian Grande'* in relation to the miraculous crucifix.[103] A document from 27 November of the same year is more revealing. This time, the *Banca*, Francesco di Zuan at its head, decided that a man should be appointed to attend the altar of 'our Christ' (either the crucifix just mentioned or the miraculous painting), take care of the candles, and, last but not least, proclaim the object's miracles. The man elected for this job is one Zuanne de Antonio de Zorzi d'Albin who, interestingly, is said to have been 'the first to recommend and pronounce these divine miracles'.[104] I have not been able to find out to which of the two objects this document refers, nor who Zuanne de Antonio is, but that makes it no less intriguing that a single man is mentioned as the instigator of a cult, or that it was Francesco di Zuan who claimed responsibility for the man's appointment as attendant. During his second term as head of the Scuola (1527), Francesco again took measures to promote the miraculous *Christ*: its altar was embellished and further adorned, and Francesco di Zuan personally donated five ducats to the Scuola for this aim. So we get the impression that, when he was in power, he did much to promote the fame of the Scuola di San Rocco's miraculous objects, especially the painting.

The same can be said of Nicolò dalla Croce, although he did it in a completely different way. We remember that he was an artist, a goldsmith to be precise. Recently a document has turned up which strongly suggests that Nicolò dalla Croce, in this occupation, was responsible for the silver mounting of the Scuola's so-called *Mariegola maior*, consisting primarily of two plaques, the first on the front and the second on the back of the book's cover, representing Christ who is carrying his cross and is being mocked by two executioners, and St Roch with two believers, respectively (made in or before 1524; fig. 25).[105] It will be no coincidence, then, that Dalla Croce's *Christ Carrying the Cross* scene, though not a slavish copy of the painting's composition, has some striking features with it in common, like Christ's slightly crooked back, his face turned towards the viewer, and the man op-

[103] '… messer Francesco de Zuanne al presente nostro guardian grando per la Idio grazia…' Chiari Moretto Wiel, 'Il Cristo portacroce', p. 711.
[104] Chiari Moretto Wiel, 'Il Cristo portacroce', p. 715 n. 65.
[105] Chiari Moretto Wiel in: Posocco and Settis, *La Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, cat. no. 383-384, p. 340.

posite him, his face shown in profile, with an aquiline nose. What is more, on the basis of stylistic similarities, the reliquary holding the miraculously flowering thorn has been ascribed to Dalla Croce, too (c. 1518-1521; fig. 17).[106] If Nicolò dalla Croce *orese* is indeed the author of these two objects which frame and propagate the veneration of two miraculous objects in the Scuola's possession, and, moreover, supporting Francesco di Zuan as main financial officer of the building site – as has been argued above – we have found in him an important figure.

But what, then, was the role of Bernardo di Marin, Francesco di Zuan's fervent opponent in matters of building? What was his interest in promoting relics and paintings, if any? Yet, his name, too, is mentioned in relation to these objects. When he was *Guardian Grande* in 1521, he did two relevant things: firstly, he proposed to open a shop in which all the votive gifts – mainly statuettes and candles – that the painting received could be sold. This measure was meant to avert a situation in which these gifts were just lying about, getting damaged or even lost.[107] Secondly, and most importantly, it was he who created the so-called 'Book of protocol' (*Libro di protocollo*) in which an attempt was made to codify all rites celebrated until that moment by the Scuola on the occasion of feast-days and other liturgical moments, and the role played in them by objects. In the book, Di Marin expressed his motivation for doing so: he feared that the memory of these traditions would otherwise disappear, the Scuola still being deprived of a proper headquarters.[108]

To conclude, there were at least three men who were promoting the miraculous objects owned by their Scuola, among which the miracle-working painting of Christ, and, although connected by the confraternity's new headquarters, they were doing it with rather dissimilar motives. Francesco di Zuan, as supporter of a sumptuous and costly new building, must have applauded the painting's fundraising abilities; for the professional artist Nicolò dalla Croce the objects led to new commissions and were thus a source of

[106] Chiari Moretto Wiel in: Posocco and Settis, *La Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, cat. no. 385, pp. 340-341.
[107] The proposal was accepted unanimously. Chiari Moretto Wiel, 'Il Cristo portacroce', p. 716 n. 67.
[108] Chiari Moretto Wiel in: Posocco and Settis, *La Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, cat. no. 385, p. 341.

personal income; Bernardo di Marin on the other hand may have regarded them first and foremost as objects of devotion and meditation, and, what is more, embodiments of the Scuola di San Rocco's still young and vulnerable tradition.

It is interesting to see that the behaviour of such different people with such different objectives was, perhaps not even very consciously, resulting in the very same thing: namely a flowering of the cult objects of the Scuola di San Rocco to an extent only equalled by the Basilica di San Marco.

The role played by Francesco di Zuan is particularly thought-provoking. Taking an active interest in evangelical ideas and church reform, he was at the same time propagating a metamorphosis of his own confraternity from a poor inward-looking devotional brotherhood to a splendid, triumphant quasi-Republic – which seems like a movement away from the evangelical ideal. He was actively promoting the, probably often excessive, veneration of relics and other objects thought to have miraculous powers, yet was approvingly following Giovan Matteo Giberti, bishop of Verona, who proclaimed that the people's devotion to their saints should actually be directed towards Christ himself.[109] In other words, his behaviour seems to have been at odds with what we know of Di Zuan's progressive religious beliefs; unless he, too, considered the *Christ Carrying the Cross* and related objects identical to Christ himself.

There is a final point I would like to make. It is known that Doge Andrea Gritti (1523-1538) was taking an interest in the building activities of the Scuola di San Rocco – particularly in the southern facade and its relation to the urban environment. This was Francesco di Zuan's project.[110] As Marin Sanudo relates, Gritti visited the Scuola in 1523.[111] Of course, Doge Gritti is well-known for his architectural and town planning interventions in a Ro-

[109] Prosperi, 'Solidarietà e prestigio', p. 19; also Guidarelli, 'Sante Lombardo e la costruzione della facciata meridionale della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', p. 20.

[110] Like every other Doge, Gritti was an honorary member of the Scuola di San Rocco. Guidarelli, 'Sante Lombardo e la costruzione della facciata meridionale della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', p. 18.

[111] Sanudo, *I diarii*, vol. XXXIV, p. 376: '… il Serenissimo nostro invidato dal Guardian dovè andarvi a messa; ma per la morte di suo zerman sier Zuan Francesco Griti rimesse di andar questo altro mexe, *etiam* per veder la Scuola, qual la fazà et portal è di le belle cosse del mondo.' The reference is from Prosperi, 'Solidarietà e prestigio', p. 18.

man, classicizing fashion (*renovatio urbis*).[112] Indeed, Gianmario Guidarelli called Francesco di Zuan's project for San Rocco a precursor of Gritti's urban renewal.[113] If he is right, then we may associate Francesco di Zuan with a particular type of artistic and architectural patronage inspired by Tuscan and Roman currents – what Manfredo Tafuri called *romanism* and what was practised by a political minority with strong ties to Rome and the papal court.[114] This sheds further light on the kind of complex social situation in which the San Rocco *Christ* was embedded; a situation shared by the other paintings studied in this thesis.

The Faithful

The cult of a miraculous image cannot flower without people who believe in it. In this case, people who believe the painting will protect them from violence and other dangers. What is known about these people and how can we contextualize their beliefs?

A vital source with regard to this problem is the afore-mentioned booklet titled *Li Stupendi et maravigliosi miracoli del Glorioso Christo de Sancto Rocco Novamente Impressa*, which was written by the north-Italian Eustachio Celebrino (fig. 19).[115] It was probably published twice during the 1520s, both times in Venice, and, besides the story of Christ's passion, it contains an elaborate enumeration of miracles performed by the *Christ Carrying the Cross*.[116] The booklet is written in stanzas of eight lines, every time concluded with an identical ninth line, 'Holy glorious Christ' (*Christo sancto glorioso*). Composed in a simple, almost naive form of verse in the Venetian dialect, it describes how no less than seventeen people, mostly victims of street violence, were saved from death thanks to the *Christ* of San Rocco. Here is one stanza as an example:

[112] See Manfredo Tafuri (ed.), *"Renovatio Urbis": Venezia nell'età di Andrea Gritti (1523-1538)*, Rome 1984.
[113] Guidarelli, 'Sante Lombardo e la costruzione della facciata meridionale della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', p. 20.
[114] Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, p. 5 and further. See also Tafuri, *Interpreting the Renaissance: Princes, Cities, Architects*, New Haven and London 2006, in particular 'Venetian Epilogue: Jacopo Sansovino from *Inventio* to *Consuetudo*, pp. 219-258.
[115] For a discussion of the frontispiece, see above, pp. 49-50.
[116] See Chiari Moretto Wiel in: Dal Pozzolo and Puppi, *Giorgione*, cat. no. 107, pp. 483-484; Anderson, '"Christ Carrying the Cross" in San Rocco', p. 187.

A poor man from Padua
Was attacked by an enemy of his
Who with a knife
Slashed him in the stomach
Then, (wounded) I tell you
He turned to holy Christ
Who has given him such grace
That he is now alive and strong
Holy glorious Christ.[117]

And another, even more cruel story:

There was a poor Frenchman,
Whose fate it was
That his brains were knocked out,
His skull in bits and put to death
A strange and heavy thing to believe
For someone who hasn't seen it
He took refuge with this Christ
Now the good Frenchman is healthy
Holy glorious Christ.[118]

And these are not the only examples of violent crimes that have happy endings thanks to the San Rocco *Christ*: fourteen of the seventeen stories happen to men attacked on the streets, who are miraculously brought back to life.

When reading Celebrino's poem, the question comes up whether the booklet's author actually relates the miracles he recounts to the object in the church of San Rocco. To what extent is an intervention of the painting a prerequisite for a miracle? A quick scan already teaches us that none of the miracles reported by Celebrino took place at the shrine. We can be quite certain of this, as the author provides detailed information about the locations

[117] Eustachio Celebrino, *Li Stupendi et maravigliosi miracoli del Glorioso Christo de Sancto Roccho Novamente Impressa*, s. l., s. a. 'Un meschino in padoana/ Fo assalta dun so nimico/ Qual con una partesana/ Lo passo ne lombelico/ Poi (ferite) non ve dico/ Lui ricorse al christo sancto/ Qual glia dato favor tanto/ Che glie vivo [e] poderoso/ Christo sancto glorioso.'
[118] 'Un francioso poverello/ C[…]omo volse la sua sorte/ Fo partito lo cervello/ Guasto el pa[n]no [e]messo a mo[r]te/ Cosa a creder strana e forte/ A chi non lhavesse visto/ Lui ricorse a questo christo/ Hora e sano el bon francioso/ Christo sancto glorioso.'

where the miracles did take place: in the region of Friuli (miles away from Venice), in the *sestiere* Cannaregio, in the parish of San Fantin, at the table in the victim's home. Neither does the author speak of related images, such as replicas in print, that did play a part in other image cults of the time. Such replicas of a miraculous 'original' might, for example, be placed on a sick person's body in order to transmit the powers of that image and accordingly heal the patient.[119] Indeed, in the case of *Christ Carrying the Cross* many such replicas were produced, as we have seen, but there are no stories that mention them. One almost feels obliged to conclude that the painting itself did not have any part in the whole miracle business.

Yet, as soon as he has recounted all his miracles, Celebrino recommends his audience to go to San Rocco and visit the painting:

> Thus, people, do not hesitate
> To come and visit him all
> For it cleans and washes you of all evil
> More than anything I could tell you about
> Come, everyone, to honour him
> And call his holy name
> That relieves the burden
> Of our every heavy load
> Holy glorious Christ

And when we carefully reread his miracle stories, we learn that people were 'healed by that Christ,' (*Da quel christo* […] *fatto sano*) 'made a promise to this Christ,' (*Lui fa voto a questo christo*) or recommended their beloved 'to that divine and holy Christ' (*a quel divino/ Christo sancto*). It is strongly suggested that, once in danger, the people in the miracle stories conjured up the *Christ Carrying the Cross* in front of their mind's eye; that they visited the painting and evoked its image when in need – like in a vision, as is illustrated in Titian's woodcut discussed earlier in this chapter (fig. 21). For those who did not have the opportunity to go to San Rocco, Celebrino thought of something too. Not completely free from commercial motives, the author recommended his own booklet as a surrogate:

[119] See, for example, the case of Santa Maria delle Carceri in Prato: Maniura, 'The Images and Miracles of Santa Maria delle Carceri'.

This praise that I have recounted
Has such virtue, oh people of mine
It is a medicine to every illness
To every hard and adverse situation
Have a perfect faith in god
And carry this [booklet] with you
Which will be your guide and escort
In every dangerous place
Holy glorious Christ

If it so happens that you have it with you
You will be joined by a good friend
He takes care that faith does not abandon you
Remember what I say to you
If an enemy of yours would come
To betray you
He cannot, even if he'd suffer a hundred times
Inflict any harm upon you
Holy glorious Christ.[120]

Celebrino is very explicit here: accept my message, buy this poem that I have been reciting, and the *Christ* of San Rocco will protect you from any harm. His concluding lines are an advertisement for the amulet that the product of his pen is said to be. Indeed, the booklet itself, adorned with a woodcut visualizing the painting, its title verbally referring to the painting, was a replica believed to be capable of transmitting the powers of its prototype.

Such a message was of course completely in keeping with Celebrino's own interests. As a professional writer, engraver and calligrapher, he was in pursuit of profit. Eustachio Celebrino's first known work is a signed woodcut from 1511; from 1523 to 1525 he was active in Venice, mainly working on publications on the art of writing and calligraphy. But he is also known to

[120] 'Questa laude ha virtu tale/ Chio narrata o popul mio/ Medicina e dogni male/ Dogni caso acerbo e rio/ Habbi fe perfetta in dio/ Poi conteco tela porta/ Che sera tua guida e scorta/ In hogni luocho periglioso/ Christo sancto glorioso// Se gliaven che adosso lhabbi/ Harai teco un bon amico/ Fa che fede non te gabbi/ Habbi ame[n]te quel chio dico/ Sel venisse un tuo nemico/ Per usarte un tradimento/ Non potra se soffer cento/ Farti male alcun damnoso/ Christo sancto glorioso.'

have written a handful of texts with a more popular appeal. How to remain healthy in times of plague; how to prepare a banquet; how to make perfumes for a beautiful woman; how to say things in Turkish: these were all topics on which Celebrino offered his readers advice. Next to that, he wrote poems on contemporaneous events, like the death of Pope Alexander VI (1503) and the Sack of Rome (1527); our miracle book, too, clearly falls within this latter category. All these books were meant to be sold to a large public, readers not too critical in questions of language and style.[121]

From the point of view of this public, Celebrino's *Li Stupendi et maravigliosi miracoli* was certainly supplying a need. His booklet gave a voice to the public's deeply felt fear of violence and aggression. Almost all the stories describe violent conflicts between ordinary people, in Venetian alleys or homes, with very severe, often fatal outcome. To us, the knocked-out brains and exposed intestines of which he speaks may be shocking; in early modern Venice, however, they were a day-to-day reality.

For although widely shared intuitions make us believe that today's societies are growing more dangerous every day, the early modern world was much more violent than ours. What is more, people of all social strata were prone to violent behaviour, which could take a variety of forms: homicide and assault, rape, riot, and domestic violence, to name just a few. Not all violence was criminalized: several types of aggressive behaviour hardly received attention from judicial authorities; interpersonal violence was a socially accepted means to solve conflicts. Overall, peoples' chances to sooner or later become either victim or witness of an attack were much higher and much more real than we would nowadays imagine.[122]

In Venice, on top of that, the first decades of the sixteenth century had generally been troubled times. The Republic's defeat in the battle of Agnadello (1509), when it had seen almost all significant European powers united against itself, almost meant the end of Venetian sovereignty. The city was struck by plague in those very same years, 1509-1510, and again in 1527-1529. In 1511, furthermore, a terrible earthquake made the city shake to its

[121] *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. XXIII, Rome 1979, s.v. 'Celebrino, Eustachio'.
[122] Julius R. Ruff, *Violence in early modern Europe*, Cambridge 2001, pp. 2-5.

foundations. And this is just a selection of things that happened.[123] It was, in other words, a highly insecure period, and people were terror-stricken. This is evident from the security measures taken by Venetian authorities at the celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi in the disastrous 1527, just after Rome had been sacked: as Marin Sanudo noted in his *Diaries*, the armed troops keeping away foreigners, women and children were a frightful thing to see, 'just as in 1509.'[124] And it is also evident, to cite just one other example, from the many donations and alms the Scuola di San Rocco received in these years of plague.[125]

In these difficult years, people were more than ever longing for some kind of reassurance. A miracle-working painting could offer this, and Celebrino's booklet helped to promote it. His descriptions, no matter how concise, quite precisely fit what we know of interpersonal violence in this period. Although Celebrino does not go into the individual motives of his perpetrators, it seems likely that the fights he talks about are the outcomes of already existing conflicts; that they were cases of revenge and vendetta. In sixteenth-century Venice, as we have seen, such violent situations were very real, and it is beyond doubt that Celebrino's claim – the *Christ* of San Rocco will protect you – caught on. And while it remains unclear whether people directed their veneration primarily towards Christ or to his painted image in the Scuola, Celebrino at least suggests that in daily devotional practice, the two overlapped.

Although immediate evidence is lacking, it is even imaginable that the *Christ Carrying the Cross* became a shrine to which the faithful appealed in particular for the control of urban violence and victims of excessive aggression. In a quite unexpected way, this brings us back to the painting's iconography. For is it not a scene of interpersonal violence that we see depicted

[123] For a larger overview of the years around Agnadello, see Patricia H. Labalme, Linda Sanguineti White and Linda L. Carroll (eds.), *Venice,* Città Excelentissima*: Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo*, Baltimore 2008, pp. xxxi-xxxiv; also Robert Finlay, 'Crisis and crusade in the Mediterranean: Venice, Portugal, and the Cape Route to India (1498-1509)', *Studi Veneziani* 28 (N.S.) (1994), pp. 45-90.

[124] Sanudo, *I diarii*, vol. XLV, p. 355: 'sicome fu fatto l'anno 1509'. The reference is from Prosperi, 'Solidarietà e prestigio', p. 9.

[125] Guidarelli, 'La fabbrica della Scuola Grande di San Rocco', p. 56. See also Deborah Howard, who writes of 60 endowment trusts set up in the Scuola's favour between 1509 and 1516, and of new donations in 1527: *The architectural history of Venice*, New Haven 2002, p. 156.

before our eyes? Is it not, in this painting, Christ who appeals to the viewers, asking to follow him in his suffering? The viewers knew that they, in return, could count on Christ's support as well. We thus find a direct link between the painting's subject matter and the type of agency it was believed to exert.

Yet apart from believers there were also sceptics. It is Marin Sanudo, the chronicler, who left us a critical note. His remark is related to the aforementioned devastating earthquake that struck Venice in 1511.[126] Sanudo's account of the catastrophe gives much attention to the quake's material damage.[127] Regarding the Doge's Palace, he wrote the following:

> I do not wish to omit the fact that half of the battlement above the hall of the Great Council fell into the middle of the courtyard of the Ducal Palace – the half that is of marble and bears carvings of lilies. The force of the fall drove it into a piece of hard stone at the base of the stone staircase, with the head of the lily pointed down. Many took it as a good omen indicating that the lily, which is the emblem of France, will fall and be ruined. May God so will it for the good of Italy, scourged by these barbarians![128]

Sanudo's hostile statements towards France can be understood in relation to Venice's defeat at Agnadello (1509); in the continuation of the war, the patrician Sanudo himself played a role, and is is thus not difficult to grasp why he was so preoccupied with his city's defence.[129] More to the point, however, here as in other cases, Sanudo interpreted the debris of an artefact as an omen for the future.

[126] See also Labalme, White and Carroll, *Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo*, pp. 373-378; David S. Chambers and Brian Pullan (eds.), *Venice: A Documentary History, 1450-1630*, Oxford 1992, pp. 188-189.

[127] In Venice, the earthquake most likely measured 7 on the Richter scale: see C. Degasperi, D. Slejko, A. Rebez, and M. Cergol, 'Earthquakes felt in Trieste from the Middle Ages to the 18th century', *Tectonophysics* 193 (1991), pp. 53-63, here p. 60, fig. 7.

[128] Sanudo, *I diarii*, vol. XII, pp. 79-80: '… non voglio tacer, che in corte di palazo cazete uno merlo di quelli è sopra dita salla di gran consejo, in mezo, e cazete la mità dil merlo ch'è di marmoro con ziglij suso intajadi, et cadendo si vene a impiantar lì in corte, a pe' di la scala de piera, in una piera viva, col capol dil ziglio in zoso; e molti ave questo per bon augurio, chè il ziglio, ch'è l'arma di Franza, cascherà e ruinerà, che Idio el voglia per ben de Italia flagelata da questi barbari.' Translation from Labalme, White, and Carroll, *Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo*, p. 374.

[129] Labalme, White, and Carroll, *Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo*, pp. 10-13.

Sanudo's contemporaries also regarded the earthquake itself as a sign. According to the chronicler, it was the Patriarch who first expressed this sentiment: the earthquake was 'a sign from God: it is because of our sins that misfortunes afflict us.'[130] As to these sins, he was thinking of sodomy, incest, and a general lack of religiosity. By way of remedy, 'it was ordered that all preachers assigned to churches should preach, beginning tomorrow morning. The patriarch ordered a three-day fast of bread and water and processions […].' Sanudo on the other hand was charmed, but clearly not convinced by the Patriarch's moral revival, noting that 'I applaud these measures as far as good habits and religion go, but as far as preventing earthquakes, they accomplish nothing, for these are a phenomenon of nature [*cossa natural*].'[131]

It is Sanudo's critical reflection on the nature of things which may give our analysis more relief. It makes us think: how is it possible that he believed earthquakes to be natural phenomena – just like we do, for that matter – but at the same time saw broken statues as signs of God's will – not so sceptical after all? The key is, I believe, that in Sanudo's view, the damage done to the individual artefact adds up to its meaning. An earthquake, as a natural phenomenon, does not have meaning; artefacts do; and a battlement with a lily sculpted on it that has fallen to the ground has a different meaning than a battlement with a lily that is just in place.[132]

In this view, it is clearly the artefact's prototype that matters most; which is, in case of a sculpted lily, France; but in case of a *broken* sculpted lily, a broken France. The damage becomes part of the artefact's meaning. It is the same with the miraculous *Christ Carrying the Cross*. The painting's prototype, the tormented Christ, gave this painting its meaning and made it work. Less important in this manner of thinking was the role of the artist. If the artist

[130] '… *signa Dei, et propter peccata veniunt adversa*.' Sanudo, I diarii, vol. XII, p. 84; translation from Labalme, White, and Carroll, *Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo*, p. 376.
[131] 'Et cussì fo ordinato a tutti li predichatori, deputati per le chiesie, dovesseno predichar, comenzando damatina; et per il patriarcha ordinato dezuni tre zorni pan e aqua et processione a torno i campi la sera, cantando le letanie et a San Marco la matina; cosse che Jo le laudi quanto *ad bonos mores et ad religionem*, ma quanto a remedij di teramoti, ch'è cossa natural, *nihil valebat*.' Sanudo, *I diarii*, vol. XII, p. 84; translation from Labalme, White, and Carroll, *Selections*, p. 377.
[132] More or less the same mechanism, but on a much larger scale still, was at work when the Doge's Palace burnt down in 1574 and again in 1577. While a sceptic might feel that it was just a building, for most Venetians the ruined Palace could all too easily be equated with a ruined State; and could even *result* in a ruined State, if nothing would be done.

would be the principal agent connected to the work, damage to that work would be lamented as the loss of a product of this singular person. But in Sanudo's view, the artist hardly mattered.

For other writers this was different, as we will see: in this chapter's final section we will discuss the increasingly prominent role of the artist in relation to the *Cristo portacroce*.

The Changing Role of the Artist

The identity of the artist responsible for the *Christ Carrying the Cross* is unknown. Yet, artists' names have been connected to the painting from an early moment onwards. Who were these artists, how do the sources figure their relation to the painting, and what may this tell us about the way the painting was believed to work?

Strikingly, debates over the painting's attribution hardly ever address the question *why* we are in doubt. An important part of the answer to this question lies in the way the painting was viewed and used in its early life. For, to those who regarded the painting as an effective miracle-working object, the question who painted it did not matter. Christ as the painting's prototype was a much more important agent than a human artisan who merely had to *copy*, rather than *invent*, the way Christ was going to look. Indeed, in documents from the Scuola di San Rocco's archives, the painting is always indicated as 'our Christ' (*nostro Cristo*), 'our miraculous Christ' (*el miracoloso nostro Christo*) or the like.[133] No author is mentioned; even the fact that the documents are talking about an object, a representation, a painting needs to be inferred by the reader. The Scuola's authorities clearly were among those who deemed the painting's authorship irrelevant. The same is true, we should add, with regard to the painting's patron and commission. Such perceived authorlessness certainly did much to strengthen the painting's miraculous aura. Efficacious images, in Venice and elsewhere, very often had an alternative myth of origin: they may have been produced at one age, but been perceived as originating from another. To give an example: many medieval images of the Madonna and Child were believed to be painted by the apostle St Luke;

[133] See for example the documents transcribed in Chiari Moretto Wiel, 'Il Cristo portacroce', pp. 715-716, nn. 65-67.

other images were not believed to be painted by a human being at all – like the *Vera Icon* (the unmediated impression of Christ's face on a piece of cloth) or the famous image of the *Annunciation* at SS. Annunziata in Florence (completed by an angel). The *Christ* of the Scuola di San Rocco was, by means of its elusive history, aspiring to the same divine, not human, origins; to the status of *acheiropoieton*, in other words.[134]

Nevertheless, from the 1550s onwards texts were written that directly mention the painting in connection with an artist's name. Giorgio Vasari's *Lives* are the first to do so, and therefore the most important source if we want to understand the profound change that the reception of the painting was undergoing in these years.[135] Let me here repeat what Vasari wrote about it:

> [Giorgione] made a painting of a Christ who carries the cross and a Jew who pulls him, which after some time was placed in the church of San Rocco, and today, because of the devotion that many feel for it, it performs miracles, as one can see.[136]

These are the words from his *Lives* of 1550. He repeated these lines unchanged in the revised and expanded edition published eighteen years later. In that second version, however, he also referred to the painting in his description of the works of Titian:

> For the church of San Rocco [Titian] painted, after the mentioned works, in a painting Christ with the cross on his shoulder and with a rope around his neck, pulled by a Hebrew. This figure, that many believe to be of the hand of Giorgione, today is the premier object of devotion in Venice, and has re-

[134] For the various stories of origin with which many Renaissance artefacts, like *acheiropoieta*, were associated, see Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*.

[135] In a note from 1532 regarding the private collection of Antonio Pasqualino, Marcantonio Michiel had already referred indirectly to the San Rocco *Christ* in connection with Giorgione. See *Der Anonimo Morelliano (Marcanton Michiel's notizia d'opere del disegno)*, ed. Theodor Frimmel, Vienna 1888, p. 80: 'La testa del S. Jacomo cun el bordon, fu de man de Zorzi da Castelfrancho, ouer de qualche suo discipulo, ritratto dal Christo de S. Rocho.' Yet this is not an attribution.

[136] 'Lavorò un quadro d'un Cristo che porta la croce ed un Giudeo lo tira, il quale col tempo fu posto nella chiesa di Santo Rocco, ed oggi, per la devozione che vi hanno molti, fa miracoli, come si vede.' See n. 2.

ceived a higher offering of *scudi* than Titian and Giorgione ever earned in their whole lives.[137]

Besides the addition of a sceptical remark regarding the money the painting was bringing in, Vasari changed his attribution, claiming that, although many believe it to be painted by Giorgione, it is in fact made by Titian. Authors before me have, not unjustly I believe, sought the key to Vasari's intriguing change of mind in the first half of the 1560s; the time when he was preparing his second edition, culminating in his personal visit to Venice in 1566. Whether he actually met the painter during that visit is subject to some debate; but in one way or another, Vasari must have come to believe the miraculous painting came from Titian.[138]

While many art historians have taken Vasari's correction at face value, others have pointed to the rhetorical and literary character of his *Lives*, or their inherent constructedness; however, I would like to go one step further by drawing attention to the constructedness of his sources. For we should not underestimate Titian and his talent to fashion his own public image.

Think of the painter's age. Vasari thought he was about 66 years in 1568, or 74 at his death in 1576. Carlo Ridolfi claimed he died at age 99. Almost all ages in between have been proposed as well; what is the truth, we still do not know. As Philip Sohm writes, Titian was self-conscious of his age, unwilling to admit his true age, but apparently deliberately exaggerating it.[139] In the gerontocracy that was Venice, Titian was making himself more venerable than he really was. This reminds us of the flexible ages of many Renaissance artefacts, to which were ascribed more venerable origins than they actually had. As with these artefacts, Titian adjusted his age to a status he deemed himself worthy of.[140]

[137] 'Per la chiesa di Santo Rocco fece, dopo le dette opere, in un quadro, Cristo con la croce in spalla e con una corda al colla tirata da un Ebreo; la qual figura, che hanno molti creduta sia di mano di Giorgione, è oggi la maggior divozione di Vinezia, et ha avuto di limosine più scudi che non hanno in tutto la loro vita guadagnato Tiziano e Giorgione.' Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. VI, pp. 159-60.

[138] See, for example, Charles Hope, 'Giorgione in Vasari's *Vite*', in: Sylvia Ferino-Pagden (ed.), *Giorgione entmythisiert*, Turnhout 2008, pp. 15-37.

[139] Philip L. Sohm, *The artist grows old: The aging of art and artists in Italy, 1500-1800*, New Haven 2007, p. 83.

[140] Nor was Titian the only person to falsify his age: see the example of Alvise Cornaro (1484-1566) from Padua, a patron of the arts and writer about architecture (Lex Hermans, 'Alvise

Another myth that Titian perhaps did not create, but at least helped much to cultivate, is that of the autograph, the masterpiece created by one unique individual. With his practice in later life to sign his works 'TITIANVS […] EQVES CAES[AREVS],' even if they obviously were the product of the efforts of a whole team, he underlined his own role as the single, noble *auctor*, and thus gave rise to a misunderstanding that has only recently, but not yet completely, been eliminated.[141] We will return to this problem in Chapter Three.

Now, why did Vasari change the attribution of the miraculous painting to Titian in the second edition of his *Lives*? This question can perhaps never be answered. Another question is: who found benefit in the new attribution?

It is not very often realized that Titian, too, was a member of the Scuola di San Rocco. When exactly he was accepted for membership is uncertain, but it must have been in 1526 at the latest.[142] Think about it for a moment: the young Titian, possible author of the *Christ Carrying the Cross*, strolling through the church of his confraternity, and seeing the incredible emotions that the painting was stirring up right at that time! Nonetheless, from about 1533 onwards, Titian reduced his administrative activities for the Scuola almost to nil; which fits the image of his internationally rising star in this period. Yet, after almost two decades had passed, he returned to his confraternity in the early 1550s and again took up administrative posts. Recently it has been argued that Titian's renewed activities after this long interruption may be connected with his hope for a commission; his hope to be allowed to decorate the Scuola's new building, to be precise.[143] The artist took up his first position after his long absence in 1552. He was also active in 1553, 1554, 1557 and 1561. In that last year he attended a meeting to discuss the floor of the Scuola's Sala dell'Albergo. Three years later, it was not Titian but Jacopo Tintoretto who received the commission for the ceiling paintings in that room. Although Titian had tried to get the commission for the largest wall

Cornaro and the construction of theatrical society', in: Harald Hendrix and Paolo Procaccioli (eds.), *Officine del nuovo: sodalizi fra letterati, artisti ed editori nella cultura italiana fra Riforma e Controriforma*, Manziana 2008, pp. 349-367).

[141] Tagliaferro and Aikema, *Le botteghe di Tiziano*, pp. 13-16.

[142] Gabriele Köster, *Künstler und Ihre Brüder: Maler, Bildhauer und Architekten in den venezianischen Scuole Grandi (bis ca. 1600)*, Berlin 2008, p. 236 and appendix no. 1311.

[143] Köster, *Künstler und Ihre Brüder*, p. 251. This contradicts the traditional idea that Titian was not interested in local commissions at this point in this career.

during the 1550s, his request had been rejected.[144] We all know, of course, how it ended: the Scuola di San Rocco would become 'a private monument to the art of Tintoretto' (fig. 26).[145]

Now, is it imaginable that the *Christ Carrying the Cross* played a role in all this? Vasari's preparations of the first edition of his *Lives* coincided with Titian's inactive period at the Scuola; this was the time when the construction of the building was still under way. Directly after 1550, year of the publication of the *Lives*, Titian showed renewed interest in commissions from his confraternity. It is perfectly conceivable that a recognition of the (alleged?) authorship of the miraculous painting would have helped him with obtaining commissions. For, if the Scuola's miraculous painting would have been his, who could have refused him the honour?

In any case, with Vasari's *Vite* the painting of *Christ Carrying the Cross* entered an early version of the canon of art. It was copiously described by Vasari, as we have seen; by Borghini; by Sansovino, Tizianello and Ridolfi. There is something paradoxical about this: every time, these authors singled out the painting for its miraculous powers or, at least, its ability to attract mass devotion. We may even wonder if we had known this particular side to the painting at all, had not these early writers mentioned it. These forebears of the art-historical discipline, among the first to write about painting as an art, were crucial in providing the San Rocco *Christ* with its status as cult image.[146] A cult image, what is more, that was produced by the most famous Venetian painter of the period, the only one worthy of making a work that was so venerated: Titian.[147]

It is well-known that the *Christ Carrying the Cross* is not the only Venetian painting from its period that resists attribution. There is a group of works that has long been the subject of heated debate among art historians, consisting of paintings now attributed to Titian, then to Giorgione, sometimes to Sebastiano del Piombo, other times to a collaboration between these masters. We

[144] Köster, *Künstler und Ihre Brüder*, pp. 246-250.
[145] Rosand and Muraro, *Titian and the Venetian Woodcut*, p. 110.
[146] See also Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, p. 28, who go as far as to argue that the simple image is a construction of the artwork; that 'medieval art' is a construction of 'Renaissance art'.
[147] See Andrew R. Casper, 'A Taxonomy of Images: Francesco Sansovino and the San Rocco *Christ Carrying the Cross*', *Word & Image* 26 (2010), pp. 100-114, here pp. 109-110.

only need to think of the famous *Concert champêtre* in the Louvre, which, when it was first recorded in the collection of Louis XIV in 1671, was considered to be painted by Giorgione, but has later been considered as a Giovanni Bellini, a Sebastiano, a Palma il Vecchio, and a Titian (fig. 27). While the *Concert champêtre* only appeared in the seventeenth century, the attribution of other works has been unclear from a much earlier point in time. Besides the *Christ*, Vasari changed his mind with regard to two other pictures originally attributed to Giorgione: the *St John Chrysostom Altarpiece* in the Venetian church with the same name (later ascribed to Sebastiano; fig. 28) and the *Storm at Sea*, now in the Gallerie dell'Accademia (later attributed to Jacopo Palma).[148] Vasari's uncertainty makes clear that around mid-century, the authorship of several Venetian paintings, which probably all dated from around 1510, was much contested.

There may be many reasons for this situation, one of which being, I believe, that 'authorship' as such was a contested notion. It is only in the second half of the century that texts on Venetian art show a general awareness of something like a personal style; a means by which a connoisseur might tell a Tintoretto from a Veronese, a Giorgione from a Titian. To be sure, already in the first half of the century Marcantonio Michiel was keeping notes in which he sometimes ascribed a painting to a certain master; but his enterprise seems to have been relatively isolated. The way authors like Vasari and Dolce perceived it, the young Titian had revolutionized Venetian painting by infusing it with a heretofore unimaginable degree of lifelikeness. No other painter in sixteenth-century Venice, perhaps even in the whole of the Italian peninsula, was praised so widely for his lifelike representations. Yet there is a major paradox inherent in this praise: for the best painter is he whose works do not

[148] The *Christ carrying the cross*, however, is the only work with a double attribution in the second edition. See Hope, 'Giorgione in Vasari's *Vite*', p. 19. In the first edition Vasari wrote: 'Gli fu allogata la tavola di San Giovan Grisostimo di Venezia, che è molto lodata, per avere egli in certe parti imitato forte il vivo della natura e dolcemente allo scuro fatto perdere l'ombre delle figure. Fugli allogato ancora una storia […]; nella quale è una tempesta di mare a e barche che hanno fortuna, et un gruppo di figure in aria e diverse forme di diavoli che soffiano i venti, et altri in barca che remano.' Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. IV, p. 45. Yet in the biography of Sebastiano il Piombo, as published in the second edition, he wrote: 'Fece anco in que' tempi in San Giovanni Grisostomo di Vinezia una tavola con alcune figure, che tengono tanto della maniera di Giorgione, ch'elle sono state alcuna volta, *da chi non ha molta cognizione delle cose dell'arte*, tenute per di mano di esso Giorgione.' Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. V, p. 86. Italics are my own.

show his art; the best painting looks as if it is life itself, and thus ceases to look like painting.[149]

It was Titian, acclaimed master of lifelike representation, who now came to be regarded as the *Urheber* of the *Christ Carrying the Cross*, the miracle-working painting with its remarkably modern design. A situation the *St Roch* woodcut, which was discussed above, seems to anticipate, as it indeed does not show the miraculous painting as a painting, but as a vision, belonging to the viewers' real world.

Conclusion: The Pious Painter

What does it mean when a miraculous image of Christ is suddenly being connected to the performance of a single individual living in the present? This means a profound change in the conception of painting as such. As soon as Titian came to be acknowledged as the maker of this incredibly successful miraculous object, its social life changed. While heretofore the image had been the index of Christ's agency alone, now Christ had to share credits with – perhaps even became secondary to – the painter Titian. The miraculous character of *Christ Carrying the Cross* was now twofold: no longer confined to its powers to miraculously heal people, to a certain group of connoisseurs it now also comprised the admirable artistic capabilities of the principal Venetian painter. We may even speak of a new understanding of the miraculous as such: at first referring to the power of an image to act as a deity, 'miraculous' now also came to stand for the skills of an artist who managed to make paintings that looked as if they were alive. Or, in the words of Lodovico Dolce: 'And certainly one can speak of a miracle at work (*E certo si puo attribuire a miracolo*) in the fact that […] purely by a dint of that little tiny spark

[149] In his *Dialogo della pittura*, Dolce extensively discusses lifelike imitation of reality (*imitare il vero*). See, for example, the passage with the famous anecdote of Zeuxis and Parrhasius, who organize a contest in lifelike painting: Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura*, pp. 150-152. Regarding personal styles (*maniera*) and lifelikeness in Italian art, see also Frank Fehrenbach, 'Kohäsion und Transgression: zur Dialektik lebendiger Bilder', in: Ulrich Pfisterer and Anja Zimmermann (eds.), *Animationen, Transgressionen*, Berlin 2005, pp. 1-40, here p. 20.

which he had uncovered in the works of Giorgione, Titian discerned and apprehended the essence of perfect painting.'[150]

As a kind of afterthought we will return to the person with whom this chapter opened, Carlo Ridolfi, who, writing as late as the seventeenth century, may give us an impression of the way thinking about authorship in the field of religious art would develop. As we have seen, Ridolfi remarked that the miraculous *Christ* attracted all the city's devotion '*per esser piamente dipinto*'. Such a thought presupposes the recognition of the artist's agency, a pious artist's agency to be precise. But why exactly does Ridolfi consider the painter's piety a condition for a painting's devotional success? His statement may be clarified with an anecdote about another miraculous painting, produced not long after the San Rocco *Christ* by Alessandro Bonvicino, known as il Moretto da Brescia. In the following passage, Ridolfi relates how Moretto's miraculous *Madonna* of Paitone came into being (fig. 29):

> In the church located on top of Mount Paitone, twelve miles from Brescia, one can still admire a miraculous image of the Virgin that Moretto made at that Community's request, because a certain miracle had happened. A little peasant was gathering wild brambles in a cavity of that mountain, when to him appeared the Holiest Mary in the guise of a grave Matron, dressed in a white garment, instructing him to make his people understand that a church should be built in her name on that mountain top, and that in that way a certain misfortune that was weighing heavily on him, would come to an end. The little boy obeyed, and he recovered. And when the Church was built, the painting was ordered from Moretto, who with great devotion gave himself over to compose the figure of the Virgin in the guise that the peasant told him to; but while he was trying to do his best to no avail, he thought perhaps a grave sin of his was obstructing him in the execution, so that, after having reconciled himself with much devotion to God, he took the Holiest Eucharist, and went back to work. And the Image came to him completely similar to what the peasant had seen, whom he portrayed at [Mary's] feet, with the basket with brambles on his arm. And [the image] was visited continuously by

[150] 'E certo si puo attribuire a miracolo, che Titiano […] solamente con quella poca favilluccia, ch'egli haveva scoperta nelle cose di Giorgione, vide e conobbe la Idea del dipingere perfettamente.' Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura*, pp. 188-189.

the people, and, acting as an intermediary, they obtained grace and favour from the hand of God.[151]

Ridolfi's anecdote almost speaks for itself. The story of Moretto and the *Madonna* of Paitone demonstrates that the artist needs to be an exemplum of piety in order to become a vessel worthy of receiving God's grace. In the case of the artist, 'grace' not only relates to the Eucharist, but also comprises the artistic *idea*. This confirms, furthermore, that the artist is not so much thought of as an inventor but rather as a (passive) intermediary; '*e gli venne fatta l'Imagine*', as Ridolfi has it: 'And the Image came to him'. The artist, in other words, is a tool in the hands of God. Thus – and this is the final point – the utmost similarity between image and prototype is guaranteed (*in tutto simigliante*). When all these conditions are met, the image can become an intermediary who passes on God's grace to the people.

[151] 'Nella Chiesa posta nella cima di Monte Paitone, dodici miglia distante da Brescia, ammirasi ancora una miracolosa imagine della Vergine, che fece il Moretto à petitione di quel Commune, per un tale miracolo accaduto. Raccoglieva un contadinello more silvestri nel seno di quel monte, a cui apparve Maria Santissima in sembiante di grave Matrona, cinta di bianca veste, commettendogli, che facesse intendere a que' Popoli, che al di lei nome edificassero una Chiesa in quella sommità, che in tal modo cessarebbe certo infortunio di male, che gli opprimeva. Ubbidì il garzoncello, et ottenne anch'egli la sanità: Edificato il Tempio, fu ordinata la pittura al Moretto; il quale con ogni applicatione si diede a compor la figura della Vergine, nella guisa, che riferiva il Rustico: ma affaticandosi invano, pensò, che qualche suo grave peccato gl'impedisse l'effetto, onde riconciliatosi con molto divotione con Dio, prese la Santissima Eucharistia, ed indi ripigliò il lavoro, e gli venne fatta l'Imagine in tutto simigliante a quella, che haveva veduta il Contadino, che ritrasse a' piedi, col cesto delle more al braccio, onde viene frequentata da continue visite de' Popoli, mediante la quale ottengono dalla Divina mano gratie, e favori.' Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell'arte*, pp. 248-249. The miraculous apparition is said to have happened in 1533; the painting was commissioned a year later: see Pier Vergilio Begni Redona, *Alessandro Bonvicino, il Moretto da Brescia*, Brescia 1988, pp. 266-269.

2

A Portrait Defaced

The Donor Portrait of Broccardo Malchiostro in the Duomo of Treviso

When, from 1977 to 1980, the *Annunciation* altarpiece in the Duomo of Treviso was subjected to a restoration, it became clear to what extent the painting had been damaged (fig. 30, colour plate 2).[1] In the early 1960s, an Italian scholar named Giuseppe Liberali had already found about forty lesions in the painted surface, almost all of them in the area running between the Virgin's head, the angel's girdle and the head of the donor figure in the background; partially on the basis of X-ray photographs, he noted, interestingly, that the donor portrait was deviant in the way the paint had been handled (fig. 31).[2] Liberali's observations were mostly confirmed by the investigations of 1977. As the curators stated, the 'poor and clumsy' style in which the figure of the donor has been painted did not fit the level of quality one would expect from a painter such as Titian – who is generally seen as the author of this work. The rest of the painting, on the contrary, seemed to show only minor ad-

[1] In the catalogue accompanying a small exhibition about this restoration, the curators present the result of the technical examination of the altarpiece as well as their curatorial interventions. See Michele Cordaro and Laura Mora, 'Il restauro dell' "Annunciazione" di Tiziano del Duomo di Treviso' in: 'Pordenone e Tiziano nella Cappella Malchiostro: problemi di restauro/ Mostra didattica', Treviso 1982 (unpublished typescript), pp. 1-6.

[2] Giuseppe Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano a Treviso: cronologie, interpretazioni ed ambientamenti inediti', *Memorie dell'Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, classe di scienze morali e lettere* 33 (1963), pp. 1-121, here p. 63.

justments.[3] The panel was also examined with X-rays, which again showed that the entire figure of the donor was painted in a manner quite different from other parts.[4] What could this mean?

On the basis of technical examination alone it proved difficult to establish when these damages in the donor figure and other parts of the painting were inflicted. Most likely, the painting had been restored a number of times and indeed, some of the incongruities in paint handling and style observed by Liberali and the later restorers may have been caused during these earlier interventions.[5] From a document composed in 1642, on the other hand, it may be gathered that the painting was already in a severe condition before the middle of the seventeenth century.[6] All in all, close examination of the painting suggests that something very serious happened to the painting before this date, more specifically to the figure of the donor. What had been going on?

Certain legal documents demonstrate that as early as 1526 – when, in Venice, people were under the spell of the *Christo portacroce* of San Rocco – the *Annunciation* in the cathedral of Treviso triggered a very negative response. For sometime during the first half of that year, the altarpiece, only three years in place at that moment, was attacked. Apparently aiming for the features of the onlooking donor, the anonymous assailant had thrown pitch and other dirt to the painting, which was damaged so badly that it had to be painted over. The main reason we still know about this attack today is that, not long after it happened, the Episcopal authorities in Treviso started an investigation; for, no less than we do, they wanted to know who had done it. Yet, they do not seem to have identified the perpetrator (and neither have I). A quite precise offender profile can be sketched, however.

More than a goal in itself, this is of course a means to precisely locate the attack in a specific cultural, historical and religious situation; to analyze the attack anthropologically; that is, in terms of agency. Compiling an offender profile means assuming that there was a feeling and thinking person with a

[3] '… l'evidenza della povera e goffa qualità stilistica…' Cordaro and Mora, 'Il restauro dell' "Annunciazione" di Tiziano', p. 2.
[4] Cordaro and Mora, 'Il restauro dell' "Annunciazione" di Tiziano', pp. 4-5.
[5] Cordaro and Mora, 'Il restauro dell' "Annunciazione" di Tiziano', pp. 2-3.
[6] 'Altare Annuntiationis B. M. V. prope sacristiam, quod inventum fuit esse consecratum, iniunctum fuit pala ipsius, ubi corrosa est, quamprimum accomodari.' Quoted after Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 63.

certain agenda behind this. Violence against images is, at least in the early modern period, not something that simply happens to people; attackers, like worshippers, have an agenda of their own. Like the miraculous image, the image inviting attacks, the obnoxious image, is first and foremost a social phenomenon.

This means I will try a different approach than authors before me have done. Carolyn Smyth, whose article on the altarpiece and the surrounding chapel of 2007 is used extensively in this chapter, mainly saw the attack in art-historical terms; that is, as the almost inevitable outcome, a climax even, of the way the altarpiece and the chapel in which it was (and still is) located, interact.[7] Giuseppe Liberali, who published the juridical documents pertaining to the attack and thereby saved it from oblivion, mainly used the affair as an illustration of an essentially church-historical point.[8] In this chapter, however, the attack itself will occupy centre stage, in an attempt to enlarge our understanding of why it is that people in Venice and the Venetian mainland attacked images. As such, my analysis takes part in a wider debate, started in the 1980s by David Freedberg, on iconoclasm and the destruction of art.[9]

When we talk about destruction of or damage done to religious imagery, particularly in this period, the much larger iconoclastic campaigns of the 1520s and 1530s in central and eastern Europe spring to one's mind. At first sight this incidental attack on an individual image in Roman Catholic Italy seems to have nothing to do with what was happening across the Alps, but upon closer inspection, things are not so clear-cut. At the time, it still seemed

[7] Carolyn Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders: Titian, Pordenone and Broccardo Malchiostro's Chapel in Treviso Cathedral', *Studi Tizianeschi* 5 (2007), pp. 32-75, esp. p. 62 and further.

[8] Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano a Treviso'.

[9] See David Freedberg, *Iconoclasts and their Motives*, Maarssen 1985; and for a slightly adapted version Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, chapter 14. See further Uwe Fleckner, Maike Steinkamp, and Hendrik Ziegler (eds.), *Der Sturm der Bilder: zerstörte und zerstörende Kunst von der Antike bis in die Gegenwart*, Berlin 2011; Bruno Latour, 'What is Iconoclash? Or is there a World beyond the Image Wars?' in: idem and Peter Weibel (eds.), *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, Karlsruhe and Cambridge, Mass. 2002, pp. 14-37; Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*, translated by Jane Marie Todd, Chicago and London 2000; and Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution*, London 1997. For examples of damage done to images in Venice preceding the sixteenth century, see Crouzet-Pavan, *"Sopra le acque salse"*, p. 623. Crouzet-Pavan describes several cases of violence directed towards sacred street images, all from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. See also Molmenti, *La storia di Venezia nella vita privata*, vol. I, p. 132.

very well possible that the notoriously open-minded Venice and its *terraferma* would be won over for the Protestant cause, and seen in this light, the Treviso attack suddenly becomes emblematic for the uncertainties of a whole era. I will come back to this later; let it suffice for now to acknowledge the many questions raised by the attack on the altarpiece in Treviso cathedral. Why were images attacked, and why *this* image in particular? Who did it and with what motive? What was the role of the artist in all of this, if any?

In this chapter, we will study the social life of the *Annunciation* altarpiece: from the beneficent role it was supposed to play in the salvation of its donor to the eventual outcome, when it became a preferred target for the donor's enemies. Thus, this chapter sheds light on the perceived relation between the portrait and the portrayed person or prototype and investigates how the one interacts with the other: for very often, an assault of an image is meant to hurt its prototype. After paying some attention to the chapel where the altarpiece has always been located, we will turn to the painting itself in order to see whether it was something in its form, its style, or iconography that occasioned the attack. Next, our examination will become more historical in character, when we turn to the investigation of the events by the Episcopal authorities and the larger church-historical circumstances. The last part of this chapter will place the events in Treviso in a wider context: not only will we look at similar things which happened in Venice and elsewhere in the region at the time, but we will also answer the question to what extent the destruction of images is related to violence towards real people.

The Cappella dell'Annunziata

Let us first take a look at the chapel and the circumstances of production and commission of the altarpiece in question, before we proceed. The attacked image is the *Annunciation* nowadays still standing on the altar of the Cappella dell'Annunziata, or Chapel of the Virgin Annunciate, in the cathedral of Treviso, a town controlled in the sixteenth century by the Venetian Republic (fig. 32). The altarpiece is generally accepted as a work of Titian.[10] Here as in

[10] See, most recently, Peter Humfrey, *Titian: The Complete Paintings*, Ghent 2007, p. 107; Pedrocco, *Titian*, p. 132. There is a document from 1517 which mentions a contract with Titian for the repainting of the facade of the Scuola del Santissimo in Treviso, which also records an order for a *tavola* from the same master. While Liberali proposed that this *tavola* can

the case of the *Christ* of San Rocco, however, the artist's name cannot be found in contemporary documents pertaining to the chapel or church, nor in the records of the investigation regarding the attack. The altarpiece, like the rest of the chapel's decoration, was commissioned by Broccardo Malchiostro (d. 1529). He was chancellor of the diocese and faithful servant to the bishop, Bernardo de' Rossi (d. 1527). Both men are known as outstanding patrons of the arts.[11] It was among Malchiostro's responsibilities to supervise the renewal of the cathedral's eastern end, and especially the Cappella dell'Annunziata in the cathedral's south-east corner, of which he became the principal sponsor. Originally proposed to provide the recently established Scuola dell'Annunziata with a sanctuary, the building and furnishing of the chapel was completely controlled by Malchiostro, who was elected the confraternity's president for life and eventually used the chapel as his burial place.[12] As we will see, the chapel is literally stuffed with references to Malchiostro and bishop De' Rossi, and is, not surprisingly, also popularly referred to as 'Cappella Broccardo'.[13] While the Scuola, mainly managed by women, was only founded on 25 March, 1519, work on the chapel's construction had started earlier. On 5 May of the same year, the ceremony of the laying of the first stone was celebrated, and, as a plaque in the vestibule leading up to the chapel declares, work was finished in October. Subsequently, the chapel's walls and dome were decorated with frescoes by Giovanni Antonio da Pordenone and his workshop, which seems to have happened mostly in 1520, according to a date in one of the frescoes.[14] That the altar and its relics were personally

be identified with the *Annunciation*, most scholars, including Smyth, have rejected this, favouring a later date for the altarpiece, around 1520-1523. As Smyth explains, two letters record Titian's presence in Treviso in December 1521 and December 1522. Especially the latter may correspond with the artist's supervision of the installation of the altarpiece. See Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', pp. 42-44.

[11] See Roberto Binotto, *Personaggi illustri della marca trevigiana: Dizionario bio-bibliografico dalle origini al 1996*, Treviso 1996, s.v. 'Malchiostro Broccardo', p. 357, and 'De' Rossi Bernardo', pp. 487-488. It was Bernardo de' Rossi who had himself famously portrayed by Lorenzo Lotto, a work now in the Museo di Capodimonte in Naples.

[12] Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', pp. 37-38.

[13] Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', p. 43; Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 48.

[14] For Pordenone's frescoes, see Charles Cohen, *The Art of Giovanni Antonio da Pordenone: Between Dialect and Language*, 2 vols., Cambridge 1996, pp. 141-156 and cat. no. 32, pp. 572-578.

dedicated by bishop De' Rossi on 1 March, 1523, when he had temporarily returned to Treviso, suggests that by then, also the altarpiece was in place.[15]

One approaches the chapel through a remarkably deep vestibule. It is built in a sober, classicistic style and is topped by a cupola resting on a drum. The frescoes on the walls, pendants, drum and dome have suffered heavily from bombings in 1944, especially the upper parts. The lower part, on the other hand, is still reasonably preserved.

On the north wall is depicted the *Adoration of the Magi*; between this scene and the altarpiece is depicted *St Peter* in a fictive niche, holding the keys and watching in the direction of the altar (figs. 33 and 34). On the other side the altar is flanked by *St Andrew*, and on the south wall we see *St Liberale*; the rest of the wall space is occupied by two windows, one real and one fictive. One level up, there is another window in the lunette on the south side; in the lunette on the opposite side the *Visitation* is depicted (fig. 35). The semidome has been seriously damaged, but it is still possible to make out *August and the Tiburtine Sibyl* (fig. 36). From the pendentives the four Latin fathers of the church are looking down and in the drum a fictive balustrade is depicted (but this is largely the result of the post-war restoration). The cupola, finally, is nowadays empty, but used to be filled with a *God the Father with Angels*. The chapel is furthermore decorated with wooden benches inlaid with intarsia panels, showing scenes from the life of Malchiostro's patron saint Broccardo and of that of the Virgin (fig. 45).

Titian's Annunciation

Has it been something in the altarpiece itself that gave rise to the aggression of 1526? In order to answer this question, we will first have to look at it more closely. The painting is enframed in an elegant construction made of several kinds of coloured marble, designed by Lorenzo Bregno, which beautifully suits both the chapel's architecture *all'antica* and the painting kept inside it (fig. 37).[16] When we look at the altarpiece itself, we see three figures against

[15] For further chronology, see Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', who has been the first to sythesize all the available information into one coherent account.

[16] Peter Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, New Haven 1993, pp. 311-313; on frames for altarpieces in Venice and the Veneto generally, see ibid., pp. 50-51, and for their design and construction, p. 141 and further. Frames were designed sometimes by the carver

a background that is partly architectural and partly consists of a view on a distant, mountainous landscape. Perhaps the painting's most striking characteristic is its asymmetry. Not only is the most important figure of the scene, the Virgin Mary, located in the foreground on the far left; this side of the panel is also the exclusive *locus* of the scene's architectural backdrop. The foreground on the other side is empty, conversely, with the angel Gabriel only approaching in the middleground, and the background giving us the small figure of the donor, as well as a number of dramatically lighted clouds and eventually the landscape with mountains. In contrast with more traditional Italian interpretations of the Annunciation theme, in which Mary and the angel are depicted more or less on the same level, here the viewer's attention is almost automatically drawn towards the Virgin only, further helped by the bright light in this part of the painting. This effect is enhanced by the strong perspective with its central point around the angel's waist, that is, far to the right, which not only gives further emphasis to the Madonna but also draws the spectator inwards, who has an unobstructed view on the painting even from the cathedral's west end. Yet, as authors before me have noticed as well, the illusion of a real space existing behind the altar is never complete.[17] The actual perspective of the approaching viewer and the perspective in the painting do not fully match; and the illusion created by Pordenone's frescoes is slightly different from that created by Titian in his altarpiece.

The least one can say is that Titian's staging of this Annunciation is unconventional. It is also difficult to grasp. This is not only true for the work as a whole but also, on a smaller scale, for the central figure of the Madonna (fig. 38). Watch the suggestion of movement in her body: the lower part still directed towards Pordenone's *Adoration* fresco, she turns her upper body to the approaching angel. Her prayer book suggests the focus of her attention until only a moment ago, but her breast is fully frontal, and her face is turned almost completely to the right. In fact, Titian seems to be showing us several

himself, sometimes by the painter, and sometimes in collaboration; in any way, it was not necessarily the painter who played the leading role in this. In the case of the *Annunciation*, Humfrey suggests it was Bregno who responded to Pordenone's fresco's; Titian would then have adapted his design to the already developing frame.

[17] Cohen, *The Art of Giovanni Antonio da Pordenone*, p. 147; Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, p. 314.

stages of a movement taking place over time, with the Virgin's head having made the most progress towards the winged messenger.

Iconographically, the altarpiece is less disturbing, quite conventional even, and, what is more, it literally forms the centrepiece of the whole chapel. Focusing on Mary's agency in mankind's redemption, the chapel's decorations show the Virgin as the Church.[18] This is particularly clear in the sequence dome – semidome – frame – altarpiece. From the heavenly dome, God the Father (now destroyed) comes down to earth, where, on the altar, the Virgin is receiving Christ in her womb: the incarnation, word made flesh, God becoming man. Mary's reaction is inscribed in the frame: 'ECCE ANCILLA DOMINI', 'behold the handmaid of the Lord'. The scene in the semi-dome provides the chapel with a typological dimension, for here we see the Tiburtine Sibyl prophesying the birth of Christ to the world of the Gentiles, as she is alerting the pagan Roman emperor August to an apparition of the Virgin and Christ Child in the sky.

On the altarpiece itself, then, the central event is depicted. Mary, traditionally grasping her robe and her veil, has already accepted God's plan, humbly receiving the divine sunbeams emanating from the sky and bathing her and the angel in a strong, unearthly light. This is God entering the world of man, with the viewer as witness to this redemptive recreation. This is when the Fall of man, the expulsion from Paradise – to which the landscape in the background may actually refer – is repaired; when Mary, with a curtain behind her, is filled with the sunlight of her Groom.[19] As the chapel's natural lighting comes in from the right, the artist has adapted his composition so that feigned and real light intermingle; the natural light becomes divine as it touches the kneeling Mary, who thus even more so becomes the focal point of the entire picture.[20]

[18] See Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', p. 40.

[19] Schiller, *Ikonographie der christlichen Kunst*, vol. I, pp. 44-63; *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, ed. Engelbert Kirschbaum, vol. IV, Freiburg 1972, s.v. 'Verkündigung an Maria', pp. 422-424.

[20] This is probably the reason why Titian, contrary to tradition, has placed the Madonna left and the angel right. On left-right symbolism in art, see James Hall, *The Sinister Side: How Left-Right Symbolism shaped Western Art*, Oxford 2008, esp. p. 36, regarding Fra Angelico's *Annunciation altarpiece* for San Domenico in Fiesole: 'The Annunciation scene itself is orchestrated in relation to the Virgin, as was standard practice. Thus the angel, and the light of the Holy Spirit, come from the Virgin's right (our left) because this is the traditional location of all things Divi-

What, then, is the role of the donor in this context? Although frontally depicted (of which soon more) and quite central – but only if we regard the altarpiece as a two-dimensional field – he is located far in the background, and accordingly quite small (fig. 39). On the verge of the mystical space where the Incarnation takes place, and, moreover, appropriately placed in the shadow (unlike the other, saintly, figures), he is for ever humbly venerating the mystery taking place before his eyes. *In ewige Anbetung*, the donor portrait works as a surrogate for the real Malchiostro and thereby contributes to the latter's spiritual welfare. As Carolyn Smyth has pointed out, the whole ensemble is a display of humility: that of the Gentiles, Jews and Romans, who in Christ recognize their real King, and that of the Virgin, 'handmaid of the Lord'; but no less that of the donor, Broccardo Malchiostro.[21] There is a number of sources that illustrate this point.

On 17 March, 1519, the communal government of Treviso wrote a letter to the bishop, who resided in Rome, in which they praised the works of Malchiostro in their city's cathedral:

> Certainly, your cathedral-church is now much frequented during divine offices, as others perhaps are not, and not only is it honoured for its services, but your Broccardo Malchiostro, reverend canon, has decorated the building out of his own pocket in a marvellous manner. He proclaims everywhere here, although modestly, that the church is his mother, his bride, and everything is derived from her. The man is outstanding and worthy of much praise, and therefore pleasing to the entire community.[22]

ne.' See also Chris McManus, *Right Hand, Left Hand. The Origins of Asymmetry in Brains, Bodies, Atoms and Cultures*, London 2002, pp. 29-30 and pp. 329-330, for left-right conventions in christianity in general, and relations between Madonna and Child depictions on the one hand and actual child carrying behaviour of both right- and left-handed mothers on the other. For the iconography of the Annunciation from the right, see Don Denny, *The Annunciation from the Right from Early Christian Times to the Sixteenth Century*, New York and London 1977, and pp. 127-129 for Titian's altarpiece.

Titian's solution has had some echoes, in Netherlandish as well as in Italian art; compare, for example, Maarten van Heemskerck's altar wings of 1546 (Haarlem, Frans Hals Museum), or Lorenzo Lotto's *Annunciation* (Recanati, Pinacoteca Comunale), painted only slightly later than Titian's version.

[21] Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', p. 68.

[22] '… tuam scilicet ecclesiam cathedralem nunc divinis officiis ita celebrari, ut alias fortase nunquam et non solum officiis coli, sed tuo Brochardo Malchiostro canonico reverendo, aere proprio procurante, aedificiis mirum modum illustrari: hic ubique praedicat, modeste tamen,

While earlier interpreted as an example of irony or sarcasm even, this passage may more aptly be read as real praise for Malchiostro.[23] Taken literally, the lines concerning Malchiostro's proclamation form in fact a perfect complement to the *Annunciation* altarpiece. Modestly kneeling and watching the Incarnation of the Virgin, the Madonna becoming the Church, Malchiostro identifies with Christ, son and bridegroom to Mary; indeed, everything is derived from her, including Malchiostro's many offices and benefices. His chapel, then, is an offering to her, as is made explicit by the inscription on the arch leading up to the chapel: 'REVERENDUS BROCARDUS CANONICUS VIRGINI DEIPARAE DEDICAVIT,' and no less by the inscription on the stone in Pordenone's *Adoration* fresco on which baby Jesus is resting, not only an artist's signature but also a document to the patron's involvement (fig. 33): 'BROCARDI. MAL. CANO. TAR. CURA ATQUE SUMPTU IO. ANT S. CORTICELLUS P. MDXX.' And, finally, in a document pertaining to the ceremonial celebration of the laying of the first stone, we can read that 'the reverend d. Broccardo Malchiostro, desiring by his own expense and goods to acquire in heaven treasures incomparable, with his own money and goods has started to build this chapel in honour of the blessed Virgin Mary.'[24] Without exception, these sources stress Malchiostro's concern with his own salvation, and his burial chapel, which is also the sanctuary of the Scuola dell'Annunziata, as a means to procure this. But they also show his devotion to Mary and his ambition as a son of the Church. The altarpiece with Malchiostro's donor portrait can be regarded not so much as a reflection of all of this, but rather, I believe, as a visual prayer. It is a most effective tool with which Malchiostro could be ever present in front of the object of his devotion, Maria-Ecclesia – and, of course, in the more earthly realm of Treviso's cathedral.[25]

ipsam ecclesiam sibi esse matrem, sibi esse sponsam, et ab ea sibi dependere omnia: vir profecto multa laude dignus et, ut dignus, ita toti civitati gratus.' Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', doc. XXII.

[23] Cf. Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', p. 59: '… the prominent Trevisans are quite sarcastic concerning Bernardo's administrative officer…'; Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 51: '… con una punta di ironia e di polemica…'

[24] '… rev. d. Broccardus Malchiostrus […] propriis sumptibus et expensis volens thesaurum incomparabilem sibi in coelis acquirere, de propria pecunia et sumptibus suis coepit [*sic*] aedificare capellam in honorem beatae Mariae Virginis…' Quoted after Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 51, n. 163. Translation adapted from Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', p. 59.

[25] For tomb monuments, burial chapels, and their functions, see Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo (ed.), *Memory and the Medieval Tomb*, Aldershot 2000; also Wilhelm Maier, Wolfgang Schmid,

Yet, something in the chapel, or, more precisely, in the altarpiece, seems to have struck certain people in Treviso as unacceptable. In the following section, I will examine several qualities of the painting and its immediate surroundings and see to what extent they may have contributed to this sense of unacceptability: firstly, the perhaps too innovative character of the ensemble; next, the many portraits and emblems of Malchiostro and bishop De' Rossi present in the chapel and the altarpiece; and, thirdly, the donor portrait's frontality.

What's New?

One of the most conspicuous features of both the Malchiostro chapel and Titian's altarpiece is artistic innovation. When the chapel was inaugurated in the early 1520s, it stood without a doubt at the forefront of artistic development; the *Annunciation* altarpiece strongly contributed to this. That innovation and modernization are not welcomed by all, is something of all times and places. But let us first look into what was precisely so new about chapel and painting.

As has been shown above, a very striking feature of Titian's altarpiece is its asymmetry. If we compare this dynamic and apparently unbalanced composition with older altarpieces in the Venetian tradition, one easily sees the difference. If one looks a bit longer, though, one gets the impression that what Titian has done is in fact very simple: he has turned the more conventional lay-out for about ninety degrees. When, in our imagination, we turn everything back, the architecture comes out parallel to the picture plane, and fills the middle of the background; the Madonna's face would be frontal; the angel Gabriel would approach her, as is normal, from the side, not from behind; and the donor, finally, would conventionally be shown in profile view.[26] It is precisely this dynamic asymmetry, this phenomenon of the apparent ninety degrees shift of the more traditional format, that has made some scholars be-

and Michael Viktor Schwarz (eds.), *Grabmäler: Tendenzen der Forschung an Beispielen aus Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit*, Berlin 2000.

[26] In Netherlandish art of the time – an important inspiration for Venetian artists in this period – it seems to have been more usual to have Gabriel approach Mary from behind, as we can see, for example, in the left wing of Rogier van der Weyden's *Columba Triptych* (Munich, Alte Pinakothek), or in Albrecht Dürer's *Annunciation* woodcut in his *Small Passion* series, which can easily have reached Titian.

lieve – mistakenly, in my view – that the *Annunciation* was meant to be looked at from the right-hand side.[27] It is also, more importantly, what makes the painting stand out among contemporary altar painting.

This is not to say that Titian's Treviso *Annunciation* is the first work to explore such an asymmetric composition.[28] Indeed, already Giovanni Bellini often experimented with this less static and conventional format. Look, for example, at Bellini's *Madonna and Child with Saints Peter and Sebastian* (Paris, Louvre), which shows the group of holy figures, as often in the artist's oeuvre, behind a marble parapet (fig. 40). This time, however, the parapet takes the form of a sarcophagus of which we see not only the front but also part of the side. No longer does Bellini use a frontal composition; three of the four figures are clearly, with body and all, directed towards the viewer's left. At first sight, this gives one the impression that a viewing position far left of the painting would be ideal; and that this is where Bellini wanted the spectator to stand. Yet upon further consideration this seems highly unlikely. Images like these were usually meant for private devotion; their relatively small size made them mobile and flexible. What is more, most of them were not commissioned but painted for the market, and thus not designed for a specific location in a room. Giovanni Bellini is here experimenting with different sight angles and trying to infuse his painting with movement, dynamism and tension.[29] This experiment was enthusiastically taken up by other Venetian painters: Cima da Conegliano, Sebastiano del Piombo, Giorgione, Pordenone, and, indeed, Titian, all started to try out asymmetrical, dynamic compositions, in which the main figures were placed off-centre, not frontal, or both.

Yet this was cosmopolitan Venice. If we take a closer look at a number of altarpieces Titian was working on around 1520 for the provinces, we get a different impression. His *Madonna and Christ Child in glory with Saints and donor* (Ancona, Museo Civico), also known as the *Gozzi Altarpiece*, is, al-

[27] See, most recently, Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders'.

[28] On this type of composition in Venetian painting of the later fifteenth and the early sixteenth century, see also Sandro Sponza, 'Treviso, 1500-1540', in: Mauro Lucco (ed.), *La pittura del Veneto: Il Cinquecento*, Vol. I, Milan 1996, pp. 225-280, here p. 255; Anchise Tempestini, *Giovanni Bellini: catalogo completo dei dipinti*, Florence 1992, p. 260; and Christian Hornig, 'Bemerkungen zu drei Altarwerken Tizians', *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 45 (1976), pp. 58-62.

[29] See Peter Humfrey on Bellini's *Madonna and Child* in the Northampton Collection (Mauro Lucco and Giovanni C.F. Villa (eds.), *Giovanni Bellini*, Milan 2008, p. 264).

though monumental in scale and innovative in its lighting and beautiful landscape setting, quite conventional composition-wise (fig. 41).[30] And the *Resurrection Polyptych* (Brescia, SS. Nazzaro e Celso) is, due to its format of five panels, simply archaic, as far as its composition is concerned (fig. 42). This is probably completely the result of the patron's wishes, however; the artist's contribution is stunning, with all the interaction between the figures in the different panels going on, the figures of Christ and Sebastian based on the recently discovered *Laocoon* and one of Michelangelo's *Slaves*, respectively, and in the background of the central panel the spectacularly coloured sky.[31] Nevertheless, in both altarpieces the figures of the saints occupy centre-stage; portraits of donors, though present in both works, are relegated to the sides and depicted in modest profile views. In this, the *Annunciation* in Treviso is fundamentally different.[32]

This is not to say that the altarpiece was simply too modern for this city; quite the contrary. Treviso had a lively humanist and artistic climate in this period and was intellectually connected with Venice and its academic neighbour Padua.[33] As Treviso lacked native artists of, say, Giovanni Bellini's standing, many patrons ordered paintings from Venetian workshops.[34] It was especially through the patronage of Bernardo de' Rossi, Broccardo Malchiostro and De' Rossi's precursor Giovanni Zanetti that artists such as Lorenzo Lotto, the Lombardo family, and, of course, Titian and Pordenone came to work in Treviso. It is therefore too easy to conclude that it was the provinciality of a peripheral town that led to the act of aggression which is the topic of this chapter. If anything, many of the people who saw the altarpiece in its early days were cultured and had full access to the products of artistic renewal that were starting to populate Venetian territory in those days.

[30] Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, pp. 308-310.
[31] Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, pp. 310-311.
[32] Even in Roman or Tuscan altar painting of the time, we cannot find parallels to Titian's Trevisan invention. Compare, for example, the Caraffa chapel in the Roman church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, decorated by Filippino Lippi. The altarpiece, representing, once more, the Annunciation, indeed contains a donor image, and quite a large one at that, but nevertheless composed in the traditional manner: sideways.
[33] See especially Augusto Serena, *La cultura umanistica a Treviso nel secolo decimoquinto*, Venice 1912.
[34] Sarah Blake McHam, 'Padua, Treviso, and Bassano' in: Peter Humfrey (ed.), *Venice and the Veneto*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 207-251, here p. 234; as far as commissions for altarpieces are concerned, see also Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, pp. 128-129.

What is more, Pordenone's fresco decorations were no less innovative than Titian's altarpiece. His commission for the Annunciation chapel was in fact the first opportunity to show his work to a larger and more cultured audience; until then, he had only worked in minor centres in the Veneto and in the Friuli, where he came from.[35] The frescoes in Treviso are the first expression of his almost aggressive mature style, with its bold foreshortenings, heavy figures and compositional asymmetries. The combination of this style of painting in the frescoes covering walls and dome, and Titian's use of asymmetry and strong perspective in the panel on the altar, provided Treviso with something as yet simply unseen, not in Venice, nor anywhere else.

Innovation as a Problem

That artistic innovation is not always immediately appreciated, not even by the *intendenti* or connoisseurs, is a topic that was widely discussed in sixteenth- and also seventeenth-century literature on Venetian art. But before we take a look at some examples, let us more generally discuss the connection thought to exist between the quality of an image and the impact it has on the beholder. The following poem, composed by the Venetian writer of satirical verse Andrea Michieli (d. 1510), may shed some light on the matter.[36] The poem is conceived as a monologue of a speaking image of Christ:

> I am a Christ who renounces God,
> for I have the form of a devilish man;
> senseless Ombrone has painted me here
> so that I cannot be pious anymore.
>
> The perspective makes my face wicked,
> being badly understood on every side;
> he has measured the vanishing point falsely,
> so that I do not find any member that is mine.

[35] Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', p. 46; Cohen, *The Art of Giovanni Antonio da Pordenone*, vol. I, p. 141.
[36] For Andrea Michieli, see Vittorio Rossi, 'Il canzoniere inedito di Andrea Michieli detto Squarzòla o Strazzòla', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 26 (1895), pp. 1–91.

Who looks at me laughs and adores me not,
despising my badly formed effigy,
that makes the masses loose every devotion.

As the crowd agonizes me,
so will I agonize him who ignores true art.
"Have mercy on me," he will say, "Lord,
that I lost time and hour
in talking and not in actions"; all in all, Bellini
will make me much more human and more divine.[37]

Michieli, also known as 'Squarzòla' or 'Strazzòla', wrote the poem as part of a series of eight on the rather obscure north-Italian painter Ombrone. A depicted Christ – most likely one hanging on the cross – is addressing himself directly to the public and, by complaining about his ugly appearance, is criticizing and mocking the picture's maker. Instead of having a beautiful and saintly look, the Christ seems a devil; the rules of perspective are not applied correctly, he cries, so that his body lacks unity (*non trovo membro che sia mio*). The Christ then turns to describe the audience's response: people laugh about him instead of adoring him. His appearance raises ridicule instead of devotion. In a nice twist at the poem's end, Michieli has the Christ come off his cross, as the reader imagines, and threaten the failed artist with revenge.

This poem makes a clear and explicit connection between the quality of a religious image and its power to engage the beholder: because of the devilish features of the Christ and the failed perspective construction, viewers are not encouraged to venerate him, but instead only led to ridicule. Interestingly, Michieli specifically speaks about '*il vulgo*', the masses, the ordinary people. They are the victims here, for, as Michieli seems to suggest, the more educated believers do not even need images to direct their minds towards God.

[37] 'Io son un Cristo che rinega Idio,/ avendo forma d'omo indiavolato;/ Ombrone ignoranton qui m'ha pittato/ in modo che non posso esser più pio.// La prospettiva il volto mi fa rio,/ essendo male intesa in ogni lato;/ il punto falsamente ha misurato,/ talché non trovo membro che sia mio.// Che chi mi guarda ride e non mi adora/ sprezzando la mia effigie mal formata,/ che fa perder il vulgo ogni fervore.// Per strazio che di me fa la brigata,/ farò costui che l'arte vera ignora,/ "Miserere, dirà, di me, Signore,/ ch'io persi il tempo e l'ore/ in dir e non in far"; donche il Bellino/ mi farà assai più umano e più divino.' Quoted after Rossi, 'Il canzoniere inedito di Andrea Michieli', p. 53.

Of course, ideas on the relatedness of beauty and God were not new at the time. Medieval philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventura, and Albertus Magnus stated that every thing in the world, being the result of Creation, participated in God's beautiful Being.[38] These ideas in their turn formed the foundation of the flowering of the arts in the early modern era; referring to the visual arts and architecture, humanist thinkers recommended artists to mirror the *varietas* and beauty of the Creation of God, 'that glorious Craftsman of all things.'[39]

The themes touched upon by Michieli – the effects of bad design upon the viewer, the masses versus the *cognoscenti* – would return in literary discussions of one of Titian's most important early works; the one, incidentally, that possibly also brought him the commission for the Trevisan altar: his *Assumption of the Virgin* in the Frari (1516-1518; fig. 43).[40] Lodovico Dolce in his *Dialogue on painting* singled out the cool reception of Titian's revolutionary work:

> All of which meant that the clumsy artists and dimwit masses, who had seen up till then nothing but the dead and cold creations of Giovanni Bellini, Gentile and Vivarino […] – works which had no movement and no projection – grossly maligned this same picture. Later the envy cooled off, and the truth, little by little, opened people's eyes, so that they began to marvel at the new style invented in Venice by Titian.[41]

[38] Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*, p. 167.

[39] Besançon, *The Forbidden Image*, p. 167. The quote is from George of Trebizond, *De suavitate dicendi ad Hieronymum Bragedenum* (1429), in: Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition 1350-1450*, Oxford 1971, p. 95: 'Nam varietas non modo pictoribus, aut poetis, aut istrionibus, sed etiam cum omni in re dum apte fiat, tum maxime in oratoria facultate, et utilitatis et suavitatis videtur habere plurimum, quippe que nam et rem muniat, et delectationes videntibus afferat. […] Hinc denique nam omnium mirabilis rerum artifex, albis violis nigris variis, ac rubeis, prata rosis ornatissima reddidit.'

[40] The installation of the *Assumption* was even recorded by Marin Sanudo in his diaries: 'Et eri fu messo la palla granda di l'altar di Santa Maria di Frati Menori suso, depenta per Ticiano, et prima li fu fato atorno una opera grande di marmo a spese di maistro Zerman, ch'è guardian adesso.' Sanudo, *I diarii*, vol. XXV, p. 418 (20 May 1518).

[41] 'Con tutto cio i Pittori goffi, e lo sciocco volgo, che insino alhora non havevano veduto altro che le cose morte e fredde di Giovanni Bellini, di Gentile, e del Vivarino […] lequali erano senza movimento, e senza rilevo: dicevano della detta tavola un gran male. Dipoi raffredandosi la invidia, & aprendo loro a poco a poco la verità gliocchi, cominciarono le genti a

So it took those who were not very knowledgeable about art some time to get to appreciate Titian's monumental altarpiece. It is intriguing that Dolce makes a distinction between, on the one hand, the type of painting from the generation of the Bellini and the Vivarini, which he characterizes as cold and dead, and the new type of painting developed by Titian, which he, in several instances, calls alive and moving.[42] It seems that it was again the perceived liveliness of Titian's paintings that triggered the strongest viewer responses.

As a social construct, the topos of liveliness was not familiar to all. Ignorance is an important theme in Carlo Ridolfi's, albeit much later, account of the early history of the *Assumption*:

> It is said that Titian worked on the painting in the Convent of those same Friars, and that he was molested by their frequent visits, and that Fra Germano, who commissioned the work, complained again and again because he believed the apostles to be of excessive size. It took [Titian] no small trouble to correct their very little understanding, and to make them understand that the figures had to be proportioned according to the vastness of the place where they would be seen, and that from a distance they would seem smaller. Nonetheless, although they could be satisfied by the good effect that he achieved, they showed themselves not completely content – until the Emperor's Ambassador pointed out the Friars' fault (because men do not easily give in to reason, as long as authority does not intervene). For as [the ambassador] believed the Painting to be marvellous, he tried to acquire it with large offerings in order to send it to the Emperor; upon which those Fathers, united in a meeting, agreed upon the opinion of the wisest, to dispose of nothing, because they were in fact aware that this was not their true calling, and that the practice of the Breviary and the understanding of Painting were two very different things.[43]

stupir della nuova maniera trovata in Vinegia da Titiano.' Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura*, pp. 186-188.

[42] For a more elaborate discussion of contemporary praise for Titian's art in terms of liveliness and lifelikeness, see below, Chapter Three; also Chapter One.

[43] 'Dicesi, che Titiano lavorasse quella tavola nel Convento de' Frati medesimi, si che veniva molestato dalla frequenti visite loro, e da Fra Germano curatore dell'opera or spesso represo, che tenesse quegli Apostoli di troppo smisurata grandezza, durando egli non poca fatica a correggere il poco loro intendimento, e dargli ad intendere, che le figure dovevano esser proportionate al luogo vastissimo, ove havevansi a vedere, e che di vantaggio si fariano diminuito: nondimeno, benche dal buon effetto seguito potessero rimaner sodisfatti, non pienamente si

Only when the ambassador, a connoisseur of art, openly showed his interest in the painting the friars got convinced of its genius. Before he came along, they were simply puzzled by the thing Titian was making; for indeed, the figures of the apostles are larger than anything heretofore seen in Venetian art.

So innovations in the art of painting may confuse audiences, especially when they are uneducated in this noblest of disciplines. Yet, difficulties in painting may also give the viewer pleasure, as argues Dolce elsewhere in his *Dialogue*:

> And the pleasure in question is not the one which gives sustenance to the eyes of the masses, nor even the one which connoisseurs experience on first encounter, but the one which increases, the more the eye of any sort of man undergoes a renewed exposure. This is what also happens in the case of good poems: the more they are read, the more they give pleasure and further increase, within one's spirit, the desire to re-read the passages in question. Because few people understand foreshortenings, few derive pleasure from them; and even with connoisseurs they prove at times more annoying than pleasing.[44]

While arguing against simple amusement, Dolce is also sensitive to the problems new inventions may provoke: complicated foreshortenings, for example, can be misunderstood and, in that case, distract the viewer from what the painting is about. This is also what Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinzio (1504-1573), *letterato* and theorist of the theatre, hinted at when he discussed theatre costumes: 'The newness of the clothes generates admiration and makes the

dimostravano contenti, finche dall'Ambasciator Cesareo non furono tratti d'errore (poiche gli huomini non così facilmente si accommodano alla ragione, se l'autorità non vi si frammette) mentre riputando esso quella Pittura maravigliosa, tentò con larghe offerte di farne acquisto, per mandarla all'Imperadore: sopra di che que'Padri, fatta la loro ragunanza, convennero nel parare de'più prudenti, di non privarsene a niun partito, conoscendo in effetto, ciò non era mestier per loro, et essere molto differente la prattica del Breviario dall'intendersi di Pittura.' Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell'arte*, pp. 146-147.

[44] 'E questo diletto non intendo io quello, che pasce gliocchi del volgo, o anco de gl'intendenti la prima volta, ma quello, che cresce, quanto piu l'occhio di qualunque huomo ritorna a riguardare: come occorre ne'buoni poemi: che quanto piu si leggono, tanto piu dilettano, e piu accrescono il desiderio nell'animo altrui di rileggere le cose lette. Gli scorti sono intesi da pocchi. onde a pochi dilettano, & anco a gl'intendenti alle volte piu apportano fastidio, che dilettatione.' Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura*, p. 148-149.

spectator more attentive to the spectacle, which would not be the case if he were to see the actors dressed in clothes that he has continuously in front of his eyes.'[45] And this, it is implied, is a bad thing, for an emphasis on spectacle distracts the audience from the play's topic.

The literary sources that have so far been discussed, should of course be seen within a developing discourse on painting as an art. Both Dolce and Ridolfi make a distinction between those who know and those who know not about the art of painting. The setting of both their texts is the development of connoisseurship and of paintings as collectibles. What does this mean when we connect them to the innovative character of Titian's Treviso *Annunciation*? This altarpiece was, to be sure, not first and foremost meant as a work of art in the modern sense – nor was the Frari *Assumption*, for that matter; both were meant as tools for devotion and revelation, and to teach the masses sacred history (as all religious images in the Western church were, in line with official decrees). The *Annunciation*'s artistically innovative features, although possibly pleasing to such patrons of the arts as bishop De' Rossi, and Broccardo Malchiostro, fell on stony ground with other viewers. Its innovative character misunderstood, it was destined to be laughed at, not adored, to use Andrea Michieli's words.

Donor Portraits

Among specialists of Venetian painting, it is well-known that there was something problematic about donor portraits in Venetian altarpieces. Before 1500, they did in fact hardly occur.[46] People did commission religious paintings with their portraits in them, so-called votive images, but these were destined for governmental offices or the privacy of the family palace; they were not meant to be placed on altars in churches. Only in very rare cases this rule was broken. Peter Humfrey recounts how the Venetian Doge Agostino Barbarigo (1486-1501) stipulated in his will that his votive image be transferred

[45] 'Perché la novità degli abiti genera ammirazione, e fa lo spettatore piú intento allo spettacolo che non sarebbe se vedesse gli istrioni vestiti degli abiti che egli ha continuamente negli occhi.' Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinzio, 'Discorso over lettera intorno al comporre delle comedie e delle tragedie' in: idem, *Scritti critici*, ed. Camillo Guerrieri Crocetti, Milan 1973, pp. 169-224, here p. 219.

[46] Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, pp. 82-83 and pp. 106-108. I have chosen not to take into account the category of the sculpted altarpiece.

from the family palace to the high altar of S. Maria degli Angeli on Murano, where two of his daughters were nuns, after his death (fig. 44).[47] And so it happened; but the horizontal format of the painting, Giovanni Bellini's *Madonna and Child with saints, angels and Doge Barbarigo* (nowadays Murano, S. Pietro Martire), made it rather unsuitable for placement on this altar; and we may wonder whether the full-length portrait of the donor pleased the nuns, who, in the middle of the 1530s, asked Titian to provide them with a new altarpiece.[48]

The peculiar situation in Venice has everything to do with the city's social system in which individual self-promotion was considered highly undesirable – especially, as Humfrey explains, 'on the part of patricians who might aspire to excessive power'.[49] The ideal situation was that of *mediocritas*; a situation in which all would be equal and uniform in order best to serve the common good.[50] This ideal of *mediocritas* was given shape in sumptuary laws as early as 1299; but it was considered necessary to reinforce these laws after the Venetian defeat at Agnadello, which was perceived as a direct result of moral decline and the general popularity of luxury and pomp.[51] On the Venetian mainland, of which also Treviso was a part, the circumstances may have been different. Especially after the turn of the century, we know of some altarpieces containing conspicuous donor portraits; apart from Titian's *Annunciation*, we may again think of the above-mentioned *Resurrection Polyptych* (Brescia, SS. Nazaro e Celso; 1519-1522). But perhaps it is wiser to connect these exceptions to an open neglect of the *mediocritas* ideal that can also be found in Venice itself.

Despite the austere climate in the years succeeding Agnadello, there were families that rejected the ideal of *mediocritas* and the sumptuary laws connected

[47] Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, p. 83; Goffen, 'Icon and vision', p. 511.
[48] Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, p. 83.
[49] Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, p. 106.
[50] Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, p. 3 and further. See also Margaret L. King, *Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance*, Princeton 1986, pp. 140-150: *mediocritas* was an important concept in Domenico Morosini's *De bene instituta re publica* (begun 1497), a treatise on the ideal republic with strong resemblance to Venice. As King notes (p. 148), Morosini considers buildings as both real and symbolic monuments of the city's unified strength: 'Just as the citizens are to be all of one mind in the ideal republic, the façades of all the buildings should so harmonize according to one grand plan.'
[51] Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, pp. 6-7.

to it. Tafuri has identified a whole group of families in Venice who deliberately broke with the norm.[52] Most remarkable is that all these families were in one way or another connected to Rome and the Holy See. This has also come up in Chapter One: introducing Tuscan and Roman influences in the lagoon, they used their disobedience to mark themselves as a cultural avant-garde and to identify as a group, keeping aside from what they regarded as 'the rest'.[53] Just as these families, Broccardo Malchiostro decidedly had a good relationship with the Vatican, and it was the Vatican that had his priority, not the Venetian republic, as we will see. For more than one reason it seems likely that the furnishings of the chapel commissioned by this man were inspired by central-Italian rather than Venetian currents.[54]

Let us not forget, however, that Broccardo Malchiostro's donor portrait in the altarpiece is not the only reference to his person he had inserted in the chapel. In fact, references to him and his patron, bishop De' Rossi, are omnipresent. See, for example, both their coats of arms on the screen giving entrance to the chapel, in the corners of the frame around the altarpiece, in the background of the *Adoration* fresco, and on the spandrels of the arch separating the chapel from the vestibule (fig. 37). The text on the arch, which refers to Malchiosto, has already been discussed; his name again appears on his tomb stone, in the inscription in the *Adoration* fresco, in initials on the frame of the altarpiece, and even in the painting itself, directly over the Virgin's right shoulder (fig. 38); the chapel's wooden benches carry his coat of arms and show scenes from the life of his patron saint (fig. 45). More conspicuous even is the terracotta portrait bust of the bishop in a niche in the drum (fig. 46). Generally attributed to Andrea Briosco, called Il Riccio, the bust's original appearance is very much obscured because of damage sustained during a nineteenth-century restoration and during the bombings of World War II.[55]

[52] Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, p. 7; in fact, the identification of this Roman-minded group within Venetian sixteenth-century society is essential for Tafuri's argument as a whole.
[53] Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, p. 7.
[54] According to Humfrey, donor portraits in Venetian altarpieces are not only very rare in comparison with republican Florence, but also in contrast to the courts of Milan and Mantua (Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, p. 106).
[55] See Luigi Coletti, 'Intorno ad un nuovo ritratto del vescovo Bernardo de' Rossi', *Rassegna d'arte antica e moderna* 8 (1921), pp. 407-420, also for other portraits of Bernardo de' Rossi. Luigi Coletti was the first to identify the portrayed person as Bernardo de' Rossi, whose coat of arms is represented on the bust's pedestal, and not, according to tradition, as Malchiostro.

Its high position does not make the viewing any easier. In fact, the bishop's gaze to his left, rather than downwards, creates the impression that the bust was not designed for this spot; or that the artist did not understand the idea of figures interacting across media as it was conceived by Pordenone and Titian. Even more portraits of the bishop within the boundaries of the chapel have been identified: the Roman Emperor August, depicted in the semidome, allegedly wears his features, and so does at least one of the three kings in the *Adoration*. But the evidence for these portraits is meagre.[56]

Some more insight into contemporary thought on such use of portraiture can be gained from Dolce's *Dialogue on painting*. As becomes clear in this text – and as is of course well known – portraits of contemporaries did not only occur in churches, but also in history paintings displayed in the Venetian *Scuole* and the Palazzo Ducale. Indeed, as we have seen in the Introduction, in Venetian history painting the insertion of portraits was widespread. As Dolce makes clear, in this genre, too, portraits could rouse feelings of resistance. In the following passage, the interlocutors are discussing the portraits inserted in the (now destroyed) wall decorations of the Great Council Hall:

> And since the truth ought not to be hushed up, I should not refrain from saying that, as regards historical subject matter, the man who painted in the Sala I mentioned before, next to Titian's battle picture, the history of the excommunication of the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa by Pope Alexander, and included in his invention a representation of Rome, exceeded the bounds of propriety in a serious way – in my opinion – when he put in so many Venetian senators, and showed them standing there and looking without any real motivation. For the fact is that there is no likelihood that all of them should have happened to be there simultaneously in quite this way, nor do they have anything to do with the subject. Titian, on the other hand, respected propriety suitably (and divinely too) in the painting which shows the same Federico bowing down and humbling himself before the Pope, whose sacred foot he kisses. He judiciously depicted Bembo, Navagero and Sannazaro as spectators. For although many years had passed since the event in question, the first two

The identification has since not been contested. For more information on the bust's condition, see Pinin Brambilla Barcilon, 'Gli affreschi del Pordenone nella Cappella Malchiostro nel Duomo di Treviso: Relazione di restauro' in: 'Pordenone e Tiziano nella Cappella Malchiostro: problemi di restauro/ Mostra didattica', Treviso 1982 (unpublished typescript), p. 5.

[56] Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', pp. 39-40.

> are represented in their homeland, Venice, and the presence there of the third man represents no great departure from the truth. It was not inappropriate, furthermore, that one of the world's most famous painters should bequeath, in his public works, a record of the appearance of the three leading poets and men of learning of our age. For two of the latter were Venetian noblemen, and the third was so devoted to this city of Venice in all its nobility that in one of his epigrams he even gives it precedence over Rome.[57]

I am aware that this passage is ambiguous and therefore somewhat problematic. Dolce argues that painters should be careful when inserting portraits of their fellow citizens in their history paintings, for they should only depict those elements that are purposeful and meaningful to the story. Yet, Titian's portraits of Pietro Bembo and others deserve praise. Suddenly, Dolce's argument that portrayed onlookers should have something to do with the story, does not count anymore. Is he applying double standards? Although the passage is perhaps principally an expression of the author's admiration for the painter Titian, it also shows us, I believe, that the inclusion of portraits of contemporaries in narrative painting was considered tricky. A few lines after the above quoted passage, Dolce summarizes his point quite clearly: 'One thing is sure: this invention of [Titian's] deserves praise – if on no other grounds – for the nobility of those exceptional lords who appear in it; the fact is, indeed, that representations are often revered because of the effigies they contain, even if they are the work of poor masters.'[58] It is, thus, the reputa-

[57] 'Ne debbo tacere, poi che non si dee tacere la verità, che intorno alla historia colui, che dipinse nella sala detta di sopra, appresso il quadro della battaglia dipinta da Titiano, la historia della scomunica, fatta da Papa Alessandro a Federico Barbarossa Imperadore, havendo nella sua inventione rappresentata Roma, uscì al mio parare sconciamente fuori della convenevolezza a farvi dentro que'tanti Senatori Vinitiani, che fuor di proposito stanno a vedere: conciosia cosa, che non ha del verisimile, che essi cosi tutti a un tempo vi si trovassero: ne hanno punto da far con la historia. Servò bene (e divinamente) all'incontro la convenevolezza Titiano nel quadro, ove il detto Federico s'inchina & humilia inanzi il Papa, baciandogli il santo piede: havendovi dipinto giudiciosamente il Bembo, il Navagero, & il Sannazaro: che riguardano. Percioche quantunque l'avenimento di questa cosa fosse molti anni a dietro, i primi due sono imaginati in Vinegia patria loro; & non è lontano dal vero, che'l terzo vi sia stato. Senza che non era disconvenevole, che uno de'primi Pittori del mondo lasciasse nelle sue publiche opere memoria dell'aspetto de'tre primi Poeti e dotti huomini della nostra età: due de'quali erano gentilhuomini Vinitiani, e l'altro fu tanto affettionato a questa nobilissima Città di Vinegia, che in un suo Epigramma l'antepose a Roma.' Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura*, pp. 124-126.

[58] '… che certo, quando quella inventione non meriti laude per altro; sì lo merita ella per la dignità di que' rari Signori, che rappresenta: essendo, che le imagini spesse volte si riveriscono

tion of the people portrayed in a painting that primarily determines the way viewers respond to it. This is an important statement, and one that can easily be adapted to our own case: images may be despised because of the effigies they contain, even if they are painted by the greatest of masters.

More on portraiture in the context of history painting can be learned from Bartolomeo Maranta (1500-1571), a Venetian-born literary theorist, who wrote about the topic in his *Discorso … in materia di pittura* (c. 1559-1571). In fact, this is one of the first texts that exclusively focuses on a single work of art, Titian's *Annunciation* originally painted for Cosimo Pinelli's chapel in San Domenico Maggiore in Naples (currently Museo di Capodimonte; fig. 47).[59] It is written as a dialogue between Maranta himself and his friend Scipione Ammirato, the latter not a great admirer of the painting; the *Discorso* is in fact a defence. In a passage on the angel's face – which to Maranta seems perfect – he explains that it took shape in the artist's mind only and was not modelled after that of a living person, contrary to other works by the master, much to their detriment:

> … Titian has sometimes [used the features of living people], perhaps to please the one who commissioned the work. But although this is easier, it does not stir much devotion, even in religious paintings. For if we see the face of a man whom we know as a sinner, and perhaps also as having a bad reputation among his fellow men, [when we see this man] dressed up as a saint, his own life still shows through, and in a certain way he makes it look like this saint has led a bad life – it will seem a portrait of hypocrisy really. And it seems that, when we look at him, he gives us reason to wonder whether we have not suddenly been cursed by him.[60]

per la effigie di coloro, che elle contengono, se ben sono di mano di cattivi Maestri…' Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura*, p. 126. It is suggested that the artist Dolce is talking about, here as in the earlier quote, is Jacopo Tintoretto: 'Ora presuppongasi, che questo huomo da bene in cio non sia punto mancato di giudicio […] mostrò di haver bene havuto poca consideratione alhora, ch'ei dipinse la Santa Margherita a cavallo del Serpente.' The latter should be identified with Tintoretto's *St. George, St. Louis and the Princess* (Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia).

[59] See Marsel Grosso, *Per la fama di Tiziano nella cultura artistica dell'Italia spagnola: Da Milano al viceregno*, Udine 2010, p. 51 and further; Van Eck, *Classical Rhetoric and the Visual Arts*, pp. 144-150.

[60] '… abbia alle volte Tiziano … fatto ciò forse a compiacenza di chi ha fatta far l'opera, peroché, come questo è più facile, così anco nelle pitture religiose non genera molta devozione; percioché il vedere il volto di uno uomo da noi conosciuto per peccatore e forse anco per

Maranta's remarks on '*il volto di uno uomo da noi conosciuto per peccatore*' make us wonder about the donor figure in Titian's earlier *Annunciation* in Treviso. If it was believed that images of Christ, the Virgin and the Saints could have beneficial, miraculous powers (see Chapter One), what evil power, then, would the image of a wicked man be thought capable of exercising?

Frontality

This problem becomes all the more urgent once we recognize the strange frontality of the donor portrait in the Treviso altarpiece. In the Western tradition, the frontal pose was imbued with a significance that can hardly have been overlooked by contemporary viewers of the painting. Already in the Middle Ages, the distinction between a frontal and a lateral position was loaded with meaning. While a frontal position was usually reserved for sacred beings such as Christ or a ruler, the profile view, in Titian's painting exemplified by the Virgin Mary, was destined for mortals or subjects. Although in depictions of narratives the choice was increasingly made to depict the figures, even the sacred ones, in profile view – for this mode lends itself rather well to the expression of interaction and movement – the distinction as such remained significant.

That images of Christ, his mother and the saints would show them in full view seems natural also, given that this makes contact with them all the easier. Images like these, seemingly following the viewer with their eyes, provide that viewer, as we have also seen in the preceding chapter, with a sense of privilege; artists anticipated this effect in order to create direct communication between the saint and his flock. As Meyer Schapiro explains in a classic essay on the matter, the full-face, turned outwards, may be compared to the

cattivo e segnalato tra gli uomini, vestirsi dell'abito di un santo, ne rappresenta la vita sua et in un certo modo ne fa parere quel santo di mala vita, o vero ne parrà un ritratto della ipocrisia, e par che in guardarlo vi dà cagione di dubitare che d'ora in ora non siata da lui dannificato.' Bartolomeo Maranta, *Discorso all'Ill.mo Sig. Ferrante Carrafa marchese di Santo Lucido in materia di pittura nel quale si difende il quadro della Capella del Sig. Cosmo Pinelli, fatto per Tiziano, da alcune opposizioni fattegli da alcune persone*, ed. Paola Barocchi, *Scritti d'Arte del Cinquecento*, vol. I, Milan 1971, pp. 884–885.

grammatical form of the first person, the 'I', a direct and not-to-neglect address to the viewer, existing in a space virtually continuous with our own.[61]

What was perceived as an inappropriate use of the frontal and profile views was considered offensive by some. Schapiro relates how a thirteenth-century Spanish bishop, Luke of Tuy, condemned the new one-eyed, that is profile, image of the Virgin as heretical. Not that he would have objected to the rendering in profile of the Magi, for example; what offended him was rather that the Virgin could apparently appear in the same impersonal profile view of narrative action as the lesser figures.[62] But also in our period, the sixteenth century, viewers were unpleasantly surprised when unexpectedly confronted with sacred figures in profile. As we can read in Bartolomeo Maranta's defence of Titian's Naples *Annunciation*, '… the other thing for which that painting is reproved is that it does not seem good painterly practice to show of the angel only half the face, while one can also show it so that the whole face appears, in order that it more fully fills the eyes of the onlookers.'[63] The problem is, consequently, that, in the eyes of some sixteenth-century beholders, Broccardo Malchiostro had himself depicted as a saint, while Mary was downgraded to the level of the mortals.

On the preceding pages, we have considered several aspects of the altarpiece and the chapel in which it was located, to see if the attack on the painting, sometime in the first half of 1526, may have been provoked by something artistic. We have discussed the painting's innovative character, that, at least in the years immediately following its installation, was only little understood. But there were other innovative artistic ensembles – indeed, Titian's *Assumption* in the Frari is a case in point – that, although being criticized,

[61] Meyer Schapiro, 'Frontal and Profile as Symbolic Forms', in: idem, *Words and Pictures: On the Literal and the Symbolic in the Illustration of a Text*, The Hague 1973, pp. 37-49, here pp. 38-39.

[62] Schapiro, 'Frontal and Profile', p. 43; see also Alexander Nagel, *Michelangelo and the Reform of Art*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 73-74.

[63] 'L'altro di che è ripresa quella pittura, è che non par loro cosa da buon pittore l'avere mostrato dell'angelo mezzo volto solo, potendolo fare di modo che tutta la faccia paresse, percioché così empie molto più gli occhi de' riguardanti.' What follows is a defence of the artist's choices: 'avendo Tiziano voluto mostrar la grandezza del suo ingegno, non volle mostrar dell'angelo se non mezzo il volto, ma di sì bel modo fe' spiccar la bocca in atto di parlare, che in vederne quel mezzo solo vi par vedere anco tutto quello che si nasconde; e parmi portarsi costoro da volgari che non si fidano di penetrare più addentro di quello che il senso li mostra nella superficie…' Maranta, *Discorso … in materia di pittura*, p. 871.

were not physically attacked. As was also suggested by the result of the painting's technical examination, it was the portrait of Malchiostro in particular that seems to have been the attackers' aim. Its frontality and its position at the very centre of the *pala* made sure the viewer could impossibly neglect it. Looking the beholders in the eyes, frontal and godlike, Malchiostro appeals to them with a power stronger than that of artistic conventions. This is something that can be understood across cultures and times: no matter how aware one is of the materiality of the image, and of the constructedness of Titian's invention, one is struck by the gaze of this man.[64] These findings are, indeed, confirmed by testimonies of eye-witnesses, to which we shall turn now.

In Search of a Culprit

On 3, 16, and 28 July of the year 1526, Annibale Grisonio, vicar general of the bishop, held inquests in order to find out who was responsible for the damage done to the effigy of the diocese's chancellor, Broccardo Malchiostro. The reports of these inquests, originally belonging to a now lost *Liber Actorum Criminalium*, have been published by Giuseppe Liberali. The first, dated 3 July, relates how the painting was defaced:

> … the image of the reverend d. Broccardo Malchiostro, canon of Treviso, that is depicted on the altarpiece of the blessed Virgin, which the aforementioned d. Broccardo had constructed and erected in the cathedral of Treviso, was attacked and disfigured with pitch and other dirt by some sons of iniquity, to the shame and blame of this same reverend d. Broccardo, without any of the usual reverence for the image of the blessed Virgin depicted on that altar.[65]

[64] See, for example, the following description of the figure of Malchiostro, which dates from 1831: 'Aderente ad un pilastro della dipinta navata, e ginocchioni sul pavimento, vedesi una figura, la qual dicesi rappresentare il canonico Malchiostro, benemerito autore di questa capella, ed ordinatore di questa tavola; figura malamente introdotta nel quadro, e che non suol piacere a' riguardanti; ma in onta di questo difettuccio, e forse di qualche altro, questa tavola è certamente cosa preziosa e grande.' *Lettere sulle belle arti trivigiane del Canonico Lorenzo Crico*, Treviso 1833 (letter dated 15 April 1831), p. 29.

[65] '… immago rev. d. Brocardi Malchiostri can. Tarvisini quae est depicta super palla altaris beatae Virginis quod dictus rev. d. Broccardus erigi seu strui fecit in ecclesia cathedrali tarvisina, per nonnullos iniquitatis filios malitiose et dedita opera fuerat pice et alia immunditia superimposita, deturpata, nulla habita reverentia imagini ipsius beatae Virginis super dicta palla

After this report came the statement of the first witness, a certain Giovanni Florio de Zara, who declared that, when he once during the preceding winter found himself in the sacristy with a number of fellow clerics, he heard one of them, a man named Girolamo da Cesena, say:

> When I go to celebrate Mass at the altar of the chapel of *miser* Broccardo and I say the *Memento* and I see the image of this *miser* Broccardo, I am ashamed of myself because one is supposed to revere this figure instead of the image of the Madonna. And when the Bishop was here, he did everything well, except that he should have had removed the afore-mentioned image of that *miser* Broccardo and not keep that same image in the middle of the altarpiece. Whoever pulls it down or defaces it will do a good job.[66]

Asked whether this Girolamo was the one who attacked the painting, De Zara answered that he was not certain, although the incident had happened only shortly after the man had spoken his suspicious words. A second witness, a cleric named Luca Venturelli, told his interrogator that he had been conversing with Giovanni de Zara and another man, Pier Maria de Zara, and heard the latter say something like: 'Look, *miser* Broccardo is depicted over there,' whereby the man had pointed to the altarpiece, 'and one is supposed to revere him as one reveres God.' He had concluded: 'One will see him defaced with pleasure.'[67] When asked how much time had passed between Pier Maria's words and the actual attack, Venturelli declared that it must have been about a month, and added that he had heard many other priests and clerics say how bad it was that the effigy of Broccardo was painted on this

depictae in infamiam et vituperium, ut creditur, ipsius rev. d. Broccardi.' Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', doc. XXVII.

[66] '… quando vado a dir messa al altar de la capella de miser Broccardo et che digo Memento et che vedo la immagine de esso miser Broccardo, e me contamino tuto perchè el se fa reverentia a essa figura et non alla immagine de la Madona; et quando el Vescovo fo qua, fece ben ogni cosa, salvo che questa chel doveve far (tuor) meter da parte dicta immagine de esso miser Broccardo et non far chel stesse in mezzo de la palla, et chi la rassasse zò o imbrattasse, farìa par ben.' Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', doc. XXVII.

[67] '"… varda, miser Broccardo he depento là", - ostendens altare dicti d. Broccardi – "et bisogna farli reverentia come si fa a Dio" et similia – "El vederìa volentiera imbratà"'. Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', doc. XXVII.

altarpiece.[68] The third and last witness that we know of was rev. Pier Maria de Jacobetis. He declared to Grisonio to have entered the cathedral only recently, noticing that the image of the Virgin over the altar was covered by a curtain. Wondering why this was so, he turned to the servant of canon Salomone: 'What does it mean that that altarpiece is covered?' Upon which the servant, named Lucas, had replied: 'Because the figure of *miser* Broccardo has been defaced.'[69] Again, Grisonio asked his witness about the identity of the offender, but again, he remained empty-handed: Jacobetis declared that he did not know.

What is more, Grisonio received the same answer when he asked his first witness about something else. For not only had the portrait of Broccardo Malchiostro been damaged: something had been given in return. On a wall of the newly build *Canonica* or chapter house had been painted 'vituperative' and 'disgraceful' portraits of him and a fellow canon, Andrea Salomone. The witness, Giovanni de Zara, denied any knowledge of who painted these ridiculous images; yes, he had heard about a couple of friars hanging around, but did not know of what order. Nor had he heard anything else.[70]

It is clear that Grisonio was groping in the dark; unfortunately we do not know whether he ever, after the interrogation of 28 July, continued his examination, nor whether anyone was ever summoned.[71]

So what happened here? It is clear that the interrogated clerics, to use an understatement, were not very eager to help Grisonio out. It is also quite clear, however, that a suspect was sought, and could probably have been found, among the Trevisan clergy. That friars had been spotted near the chapter house, but their order could not be identified, not even by members of the clergy itself, sounds extremely implausible: habits demarcated orders.

[68] 'Et quod etiam a multis aliis sacerdotibus et clericis audivit dici quod malum est quod effigies dicti d. Broccardi esset depicta super pallam altaris praedicti.' Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', doc. XXVII.

[69] '"… che vol dir che i tien quella palla coperta?" Tunc dictus Lucas respondit "perchè l'è stà imbratà la figura de miser Broccardo"'. Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', doc. XXVII.

[70] 'Interrogatus idem testis, si scit qui pinxisset figuras illas super domo capituli quae aedificatur super plathea eccl. Tarvisine in vituperium et obbrobrium reverendorum d. Broccardi antedicti et d. Andreae Salomonis: qui respondit se non aliter scire nisi quae dici audivit a nonnulis, a quibus autem non recordari, quod fuerunt certi fratres; tamen se nescire cuius ordinis existant, nec aliter nec alia dixit se scire.' Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', doc. XXVII; see also p. 59.

[71] Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 59.

So either the witnesses were protecting their colleagues, or afraid to speak out. And what was it that had precisely been done to Malchiostro's image? It had been smeared with pitch 'and other dirt'. Then someone had covered the altarpiece with a curtain. More or less at the same time, figures of Malchiostro and Salomone were painted on the canons' new building. Thus, one image was spoilt while another was created. When exactly all this happened cannot precisely be determined: the interrogations were held in July, but witnesses referred to the preceding winter, and say that some time, or a month had passed between the verbal and actual assaults on the image. If the attack indeed took place in, let's say, late Winter – that it was around Carnival is likely for reasons to which I will return – I do not know why interrogations were held only in July. It seems strange, too, that the third witness, De Jacobetis, would only have heard of it shortly before his interrogation, as he asserts: one imagines that rumour of such a remarkable event would spread rather fast among the clerical community. And then, finally, the *why*. As to the reasons of the clergy's irritations, the documents luckily say quite a lot. It is the image itself which figures prominently here: one was supposed to revere Malchiostro as if he is God (*bisogna farli reverentia come si fa a Dio*), the clerics complain; he instead of the Madonna asked for devotion (*el se fa reverentia a essa figura et non alla immagine de la Madona*). Many clerics apparently thought it a shame that his effigy was depicted over the altar. And it is the bishop who was reprimanded for not taking action when he visited his diocese – probably his visit upon the chapel's consecration, early in 1523, is meant here. De' Rossi, or so Girolamo da Cesana would have said, should not have consented to a portrait of Malchiostro in the middle of the altarpiece (*non far chel stesse in mezzo de la palla*). Thus the image, all seem to agree, deserved its cruel fate.

Before we delve into the wider social and religious contexts of the attack, let us pose a simple question: why Broccardo Malchiostro? For, surely, not every donor portrait in the sixteenth-century Venetian Republic was attacked. That it was Malchiostro's portrait, of all things, which suffered from violence, may therefore have something to do with the reputation of the portrait's prototype. This is based on the hypothesis that, had Malchiostro

been loved among his fellow clergymen, an attack would not have happened.[72]

What can be said about Malchiostro's reputation? It was not very good. Malchiostro belonged to a group of foreigners – Parmesans, mainly – 'imported' into the diocese with the appointment of bishop De' Rossi (1499).[73] The first years of the new century were a difficult period for Treviso, that, like Venice, suffered from wars and the plague.[74] Immediately from the start of his episcopacy, De' Rossi was involved in conflicts, and with him was his chancellor Malchiostro.[75] Indeed, the two of them ruled Treviso with iron hand, and much more than their predecessors, managed to exert control over the goods and money of the diocese.[76] When, during the war of Cambrai, De' Rossi's brother Filippo, who was fighting as a *condottiere* on behalf of the Venetian Republic, went over to the imperial side, not only Filippo but also Bernardo was put in jail, the latter being called to Venice and held captive until October 1510. After his release, Bernardo decided to try his luck elsewhere, particularly in Rome, and he therefore delegated most of his Episcopal responsibilities to Malchiostro.[77]

All through De' Rossi's episcopacy, Malchiostro served as faithful intermediary, which not only meant his involvement in obscure businesses such as

[72] Thomas Martin, in his study of Alessandro Vittoria's sculptured portrait busts, provides fascinating material for comparison: one Benedetto Manzini, canon of S. Marco in Venice and parish priest of S. Geminiano (on the opposite side of the *piazza*, before its destruction by Napoleon's troops) had a portrait bust of himself (by Vittoria, now Ca' d'Oro) placed in his parish church, and, as Martin convincingly argues, had himself portrayed a second time by Veronese, this time in the guise of St Severus, on the organ shutters in the same church (now Galleria Estense, Modena). Such self-promotion was very uncommon in Venice; and what to think of the location, right opposite S. Marco? Yet, Francesco Sansovino in his earliest guidebook to the city lavishly praised the man for his many qualities, and indeed, Manzini seems to have come off well. See Thomas Martin, *Alessandro Vittoria and the Portrait Bust in Renaissance Venice: Remodelling Antiquity*, Oxford 1998, pp. 57-61 and cat. no. 16, pp. 118-120.

[73] Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', p. 32 n. 2; Marco Cervellini, *Guida al duomo di Treviso*, Treviso 1994, p. 12.

[74] Cervellini, *Guida al duomo di Treviso*, p. 12.

[75] Smyth, 'Insiders and Outsiders', pp. 55-62; Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', *passim*; Biscaro, 'Il dissidio tra Gerolamo Contarini podestà e Bernardo de Rossi vescovo di Treviso', *passim*.

[76] Biscaro, 'Il dissidio tra Gerolamo Contarini podestà e Bernardo de Rossi vescovo di Treviso'.

[77] Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', *passim*; also Gerolamo Biscaro, 'Il dissidio tra Gerolamo Contarini podestà e Bernardo de Rossi vescovo di Treviso e la congiura contro la vita del vescovo', *Archivio veneto* 7 (1930), pp. 1-53.

De' Rossi's switch to serving the Pope after his brother's betrayal of Venice, or this same brother's wish to marry his mistress; Malchiostro was also responsible for the collection of taxes and donations and the confiscation of goods from debtors – all the more urgent as someone had to pay for De' Rossi's extravagant Roman lifestyle. At the first pastoral visit of the bishop, it was Malchiostro who accompanied him; who inventoried moveable and immoveable property in the churches, who passed on irregularities to the Curia, verified benefices, and drew up guidelines for reform. All in all, Malchiostro made sure he was present anywhere financial business was being discussed, which, inflexible and ambitious as he seems to have been, will not have done his reputation in the diocese much good.[78]

We know, furthermore, that Malchiostro was a loyal servant to the Habsburg Emperors and to the Holy See; he was a member of the Sacro Palazzo Lateranense and of the Concistoro and in 1518 received the title of *conte palatino* from Emperor Maximilian I.[79] During his career he managed to obtain numerous ecclesiastical benefices. And he never forgot where he came from: in his will, drawn up on 31 December 1527, he made sure that after his death, money should be left for the celebration of masses not only in his Cappella dell'Annunziata in Treviso, but also in the church of S. Moderanno in Berceto, near Parma.[80]

Seen in the context of church history, the situation in Treviso seems nothing outside of the ordinary. Indeed, it was quite normal for bishops to take up residence elsewhere, like De' Rossi did; usually in the largest cities of Italy, Venice, Rome or Naples, where they lived as aristocrats rather than pastors.[81] The administration of the episcopacy then became the task of functionaries lower in the hierarchy; in other words, figures such as Malchiostro.

[78] Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', pp. 52-4; also Biscaro, 'Il dissidio tra Gerolamo Contarini podestà e Bernardo de Rossi vescovo di Treviso'.

[79] Angelo Campagner, *Cronaca capitolare: I Canonici della Cattedrale di Treviso*, Vedelago 1992, p. 480. As Charles Cohen suggests, his new title may have been the instigation for the decoration of his Annunciation chapel (see Cohen, *The Art of Giovanni Antonio da Pordenone*, vol. I, p. 144)

[80] Biblioteca Capitolare della cattedrale di Treviso, *Cathasticum reverendi Capituli ecclesie Tarvisine*, ms. 77, c. 249r.

[81] Jean-Marie Mayeur (ed.), *Die Geschichte des Christentums. Religion, Politik, Kultur*, vol. VII, Freiburg 1995, pp. 335-336; Hubert Jedin (ed.), *Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, vol. IV: *Reformation, Katholische Reform und Gegenreformation*, Freiburg, Basel, and Vienna 1967, p. 460.

For the minority of this group which, in the decades preceding Trent, actually had ambitions towards reform, it proved very difficult if not impossible to get something going: in this time of flowering anticlericalism, reform-minded officials were an easy target. Clerics were busy scoffing at each other anyhow: particularly in sermons, they were insulting their fellow clergymen (as long as they did not belong to their own group), to the extent that, as has been argued, preaching took on the character of spoken caricature.[82]

It is against this background that the disturbances in Treviso gain relief. As a reform-minded exponent of the absent, worldly-living bishop, the rigid Malchiostro met with huge resistance, not only from the regular clergy but also, and even more strongly, from within; from members of his chapter. It is significant that his own appointment as canon had long been thwarted.[83] Following an attack on canon Locatelli, who belonged to the De' Rossi-Malchiostro group, in April 1526, it was a fellow canon, one Alessandro Thealdino, who was mentioned as possible culprit. Together with Girolamo da Cesena, *altarista* at S. Lorenzo, who was also named in the case of the painting, Thealdino would have wanted to prevent Locatelli from participating in the elections for the seminary held the next day.[84] And indeed, after De' Rossi's and Malchiostro's deaths, it was the faction to which Thealdino belonged that in Treviso assumed power.[85] For this faction, Malchiostro's donor portrait had been an ideal target.[86]

[82] Mayeur, *Die Geschichte des Christentums*, vol. VII, pp. 147-151.

[83] Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 60 and doc. XL; in 1509, the canons voted against his candidacy.

[84] Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', pp. 59-60.

[85] Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 60, n. 197.

[86] There are parallels here with what happened to a certain Don Dionisio of Verona, who, as Philipp Fehl relates, had once been prior of the monastery of S. Lucia in Vicenza. In 1587, the curate of this church denounced Don Dionisio for his allegedly bad life in a letter to the Venetian Holy Office. According to the curate, Don Dionisio not only had two mistresses, who, together with a child of his, lived with him in his quarters, he also had himself portrayed in an altarpiece in the act of adoring a mistress, represented in the guise of S. Lucia or S. Apollonia (which of the two the curate was not sure). Perhaps not surprisingly, the Inquisition decided not to prosecute. Indeed, the surviving documents leave one with the impression that the curate was desperately looking for something he could hurt Dionisio with; the portrait in the altarpiece must have seemed a fine enough opportunity. The altarpiece in question was painted by the local artist Alessandro Maganza (1556-c. 1630/1640), son of the painter-poet Giovanni Battista Maganza (c. 1513-1586), nicknamed Magagnò. It was described by Marco Boschini in his *I gioeli pittoreschi virtuoso ornamento della città di Vicenza* (Venice, 1676), where no portrait of a mistress is mentioned. The painting seems no longer extant. Philipp P. Fehl, *Decorum and Wit:*

Nonetheless, the question remains. Why do people ruin images? Or, to quote David Freedberg, why should an attack on an image seem to be an appropriate mode of making a political point?[87] So far, we have extensively examined the image itself as an instigator of aggression; our findings in that respect have been confirmed by the relevant documents. We have delved into the historical circumstances of the attack. But the problem needs further analysis from another point of view: that of anthropology.

A very first step would be to acknowledge that an attack on an image is an attack on the image's prototype. Portraits in the early modern period were understood as direct substitutes for their sitters, and this meant that the circulation of portraits could mirror and expand the system of personal patronage – the distribution of personhood, as Alfred Gell would have it.[88] It is of course this mechanism that Malchiostro tried to exploit in full in his chapel. Yet, the direct connection between image and prototype not always worked to the sitter's advantage: it also made him or her extremely vulnerable to the malevolent. We still recognize this mechanism to day: not surprisingly, in many countries the person portrayed in a photograph is the only rightful claimant to that picture. Having one's portrait exposed was as much as having part of one's body outside the body, not completely under control – as the Treviso attackers understood only too well.

Image Destruction and Pictorial Mockery

Recently, scholars working on iconoclasm have argued that image breaking and image making often coincide.[89] Damaging images almost always leads to the production of something new; there is a creative side to violence. Treviso was certainly no exception in that sense; but apart from changing Titian's altarpiece in something 'new' when attacking it, the perpetrators also created

The Poetry of Venetian Painting: Essays in the History of the Classical Tradition, Vienna 1992, pp. 246-247.

[87] Freedberg, *Iconoclasts and their Motives*, p. 11.

[88] Joanna Woodall, 'Introduction: Facing the Subject', in: idem (ed.), *Portraiture: Facing the Subject*, Manchester and New York 1997, pp. 1-25, here p. 3; Gell, *Art and Agency*, p. 96 and further.

[89] Most importantly, Uwe Fleckner, Maike Steinkamp, and Hendrik Ziegler, 'Produktive Zerstörung. Konstruktion und Dekonstruktion eines Forschungsgebiets', in: id., *Der Sturm der Bilder*, pp. 1-11.

new images when chalking images of Broccardo Malchiostro and Andrea Salomone on the wall of the nearby chapter house. Consequently we may ask, what exactly were those figures (*figuras illas*), and in what way do they relate to the attack of Malchiostro's effigy on the altarpiece of the *Annunciation*? These questions are legitimate if only for the way the two affronts were treated by the Trevisan diocese: part of the same case, object of the same interrogations, the one, as people in Treviso seemed to consider it, should be understood in close connection to the other.

Let us first ask what such figures could have looked like. Speaking about early caricature, or what we may rather call 'graffiti' (as opposed to the modern art of caricature, which developed in the circle of the Carracci around 1600), several authors have pointed to stylistic naiveté as an important characteristic.[90] This is the sort of naiveté simulated by Michelangelo and his friends when they held a contest to see who could best draw a figure without design, as Vasari says, 'similar to those doll-like creatures made by the ignorant who deface (*imbrattano*) the walls of buildings.'[91] Indeed, as Ernst Gombrich explains, what he calls 'infantile modes of behaviour' belong to the most common techniques of humour, and this counts for deliberately primitive images as well.[92]

In early representations of demonic and other evil figures, the chosen format was often the profile. As Meyer Schapiro argues, this surely had an aesthetic ground: as opposed to the round and ideal closure of the full-face, the profile is asymmetrical and indented and shows a less complete but more characteristic face. It therefore lent itself particularly well to the first caricaturists, who invested the profile with comic accents and exaggerated proportions.[93] To be sure, early caricature was not the only genre in which the profile

[90] Ernst H. Gombrich, 'Introduction', in: idem, *The Uses of Images: Studies in the Social Function of Art and Visual Communication*, London 1999, p. 8.

[91] 'Nella sua gioventù, sendo con gli amici sua pittori, giucorno una cena a chi faceva una figura che non avessi niente di disegno, che fussi goffa, simile a que' fantocci che fanno coloro che non sanno et imbrattano le mura.' Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. VI, p. 115; the reference is from Lavin, 'Bernini and the Art of Social Satire', p. 33.

[92] Gombrich, 'Pleasures of Boredom', in *The Uses of Images*, pp. 212-225, here p. 215.

[93] Schapiro, 'Frontal and profile', p. 45. For ancient examples, see Irving Lavin, 'Bernini and the Art of Social Satire', in: idem (ed.), *Drawings by Gianlorenzo Bernini from the Museum der Bildenden Künste Leipzig, German Democratic Republic*, Princeton 1981, pp. 25-54, here p. 32 and further.

was the preferred view: portraits of emperors and other rulers had a long tradition of showing the sitter's side. We may add that it is the contrast which is meaningful; that both the frontal and the profile view are 'frameworks within which an artist can reinforce a particular quality of the figure, while exploiting an effect latent in that view.'[94] An illustrative example is the distinction made in the *Christ Carrying the Cross*, discussed in chapter one: the face of Christ in three-quarter view versus the Jewish executioner in a strict, idiosyncratic profile.[95] While Schapiro suggests that the profile in early caricature, through a certain sense of detachment, may have softened the affront of pictorial mockery, we may ask whether, on the contrary, the view from the side did not further contribute to the depersonalization or objectification of the portrayed person.[96]

We may gain a more thorough understanding of the nature of the graffiti with which we are concerned from the following, Venetian, example. Philipp Fehl and Marilyn Perry have discovered records pertaining to a 'particularly scandalous incident' involving a number of pornographic drawings or graffiti on the *Canonica* of San Marco in Venice.[97] Discovered late November 1566 by one of the canons and by Gioseffo Zarlino, the famous musician and *Maestro di Cappello* of San Marco, the charcoal drawings represented phalluses, complete with feet and wings, urinating in chalices, devil-like creatures drinking from these chalices and, as Fehl has it, 'further copious suggestions of sacrilege'.[98] The impact these drawings had on the government is conveyed

[94] Schapiro, 'Frontal and profile', p. 45.
[95] For more examples of profile heads of Jews in contrast to full-faced Christians, see Schapiro, 'Frontal and Profile', pp. 62-63, n. 97.
[96] See the classical essay on profile portraits of women as the expression of women's objectification in the Renaissance: Patricia Simons, 'Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture', *History Workshop Journal* 25 (1988), pp. 4-30, reprinted in: Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (eds.), *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, Boulder 1992, pp. 38-57. On objectification and caricature see also Woodall, 'Facing the Subject', p. 14.
[97] For the following, I am relying upon the results of Fehl and Perry's search through the archives of the Inquisition in Venice for documents relating to artists and art: Philipp P. Fehl and Marilyn Perry, 'Painting and the Inquisition at Venice,' in: David Rosand (ed.), *Interpretazioni veneziane: studi di storia dell'arte in onore di Michelangelo Muraro*, Venice 1984, pp. 371-383; republished as appendix II of Fehl's essay 'Veronese and the Inquisition' in idem, *Decorum and Wit*. It seems that much more material of this kind may still be found in the Venetian and Veneto archives. See also the publications of A. Stella, cited in *Decorum and Wit*, p. 392, n. 11.
[98] Fehl, *Decorum and Wit*, p. 245; for full transcriptions see pp. 251-256.

by the Florentine ambassador of that moment, Cosimo Bartoli, who suggests that the attack was directed towards the Inquisition itself, which resided in the *Canonica* during the winter, and who had the impression, due to the extremely high rewards promised to the person who could identify the perpetrator(s), that the Venetian Republic herself felt offended.[99] Although one of the victims declared the drawings to be made by 'some sad Lutheran,' no-one was ever caught.[100]

To be sure, such displays of the male member on walls and doors – that is, in liminal places – occur very often and in many cultures, and are not always held to be offensive. Indeed, many people believed sexual emblems on such locations to have an apotropaic effect, marking territory and chasing away demons and evil spirits.[101] The famous Venetian writer Pietro Aretino, a true apologist of the sexual, wrote to one of his friends: 'What is wrong about seeing a man climbing on top of a woman? So animals should be freer than us? It seems to me that nature has given this to us in order to preserve itself, and that one should wear it around one's neck as a pendant, and on one's cap as a medal …'[102] The wings which adorned the phalluses on the Canonica's façade also occur in sexual, apotropaic amulets. Yet the Venetian graffiti seem to have been more than innocent protection from evil forces, if only because the Venetian state took the case so seriously.

Around the time the drawings in Venice were discovered, similar things happened in Arzignano, near Vicenza, where an offensive drawing had been

[99] 'Et hier mattina andò un bando horribilissimo perdonando a chi rivelava lo autore di tale eccesso con donativo di 1000 scudi et … di poter rimettere sbanditi et d'altrj privilegij, molto più spaventevole che se fussi cosa di stato…' Cosimo Bartoli to the Florentine Medici Duke, Cosimo I, letter dated 7 December 1566 (published in Fehl, *Decorum and Wit*, p. 256).

[100] '… Cl.mo Signor veda la V.M. che può esser stato altri che qualche Tristo Lutherano, che habbia fatto queste vergogne in contempto et dispretio della Religione.' Quoted after Fehl, *Decorum and Wit*, p. 253.

[101] Jan Baptist Bedaux, 'Laatmiddeleeuwse sexuele amuletten. Een sociobiologische benadering', in: idem and Jos Koldeweij (eds.), *Annus quadriga mundi. Opstellen over middeleeuwse kunst opgedragen aan prof. dr. Anna C. Esmeijer*, Zutphen 1989, pp. 16-30.

[102] 'Che male è il vedere montare un uomo adosso a una donna? Adunque le bestie debbono essere piú libere di noi? A me parebbe che il cotale datoci da la natura per conservazion di se stessa, si dovesse portare al collo come pendente, e ne la beretta per medaglia.' Pietro Aretino, *Lettere*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli, vol. I, Rome 1997, no. 308, pp. 424-426, here p. 425. For a thorough interpretation of the entire letter, see Raymond B. Waddington, *Aretino's Satyr: Sexuality, Satire, and Self-Projection in Sixteenth-Century Literature and Art*, Toronto 2004, particularly chapter one.

affixed in a public spot. Interestingly, a copy of this drawing survives to this day in the Archivio di Stato in Venice (fig. 48). The primitively drawn image contains two phalluses, one large and one small, which both are urinating in chalices. The largest of the two carries an inscription: '*Questo Cazzo in culo al Vescovo, e l'altro al mag.co Podesta, i quali sono li dui cuionj di questa mag.ca nostra città*.'[103] And it got worse: for this was not the only picture found. As Fehl relates, offences continued, a drawing of a haloed phallus was discovered in a church, and other drawings of the sort; reports came in of desecrations of the host. At last, a culprit was identified, convicted, beheaded and his corpse was, like that of a heretic, burnt at the stake.[104] It is worth noting how fiercely criminals of this kind were being punished: clearly, satirizing by means of images was usually considered no light offence.

With regard to Malchiostro's case, events like those happening at the Venetian *Canonica* and in Arzignano may further clarify the sort of drawings of which Malchiostro became a victim. More generally, they put the frightful events in Treviso in perspective. Thus, we may wonder whether thinking of it in terms of 'incidents' is actually fruitful; the available material, which uncovers, no doubt, only the tip of the iceberg, suggests that the desecration of religious imagery was in fact a recurring phenomenon. What makes Malchiostro's case stand out is that one of the images involved, namely Titian's altarpiece, was, at the time of the attack, standing at the forefront of artistic development.

For a glimpse of what the images of Malchiostro and Salomono may have looked like, we could also turn to the products of contemporary iconoclasm in the North. Indeed, already during the iconoclastic movements in Byzantium caricatures had been used to mock the enemy, a practice taken up during the iconoclastic upheavals of the Reformation.[105] And this brings us, indeed, to the narrow relation between destruction of images on the one hand, and pictorial mockery on the other. Iconoclasts did not only damage and deform existing images, but, partially through their damaging acts, also made new ones, parodies of standard iconographies, what Joseph Koerner calls a 'succes-

[103] In English: 'This prick in the arse of the Bishop, and the other one in that of the magnificent *Podestà*, who are the two biggest jerks of our magnificent city.' A.S.V., *Santo Uffizio*, Processi, *busta* 21. The reference is from Fehl, *Decorum and Wit*, pp. 246 and 251 and further.
[104] Fehl, *Decorum and Wit*, pp. 245-246.
[105] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, pp. 148-149.

sion of image by image'.[106] Rather than two unrelated, or diametrically opposed forms of behaviour, defacement of images and pictorial mockery are thus two aspects of a much broader cultural phenomenon. What connects the two is that they both harm or ridicule the image's prototype.

I would argue that the attack on Malchiostro's effigy in the altarpiece and the elusive images of him and his fellow canon Salomone on the wall of the chapter house, should be considered as two results of a situation perhaps much more wide-ranging than what we can imagine on the basis of the extant documents alone. Though smashing (part of) a religious image, the attackers did not do away with images as such; they needed them as badly as any other, and even produced another image of Malchiostro with which they emphasized their point.

As an aside, it may be noted that bishop Bernardo de' Rossi also became the victim of what may well have been pictorial satire. During the Carnival of 1520 De' Rossi, then Vicelegate and Governor of Romagna and Bologna, met with resistance when he decided to forbid the wearing of masks. Upon his decision, a satire was attached to the doors of the *Studio*. Whether this satire was visual or verbal in character, or both, the sources do not tell; more important is the similarity with what happened in Treviso only a few years later – although we do not know whether Malchiostro would have reacted as fiercely as his bishop, who punished a suspect student from Parma with beheading.[107]

Image Destruction and Ritual Violence

Besides the violence inflicted upon his portrait, Broccardo Malchiostro more than once became the victim of actual violence – indeed, the attack on his picture and attacks on his physical body seem to be part of a continuum. The first instance occurred on 29 September, 1503, when, apparently at the very last moment, an assault on the life of the bishop and a number of his trustees was thwarted. That day, a member of the Dominican order was taken captive under suspicion of leading a group of assassins planning to take the lives of

[106] Joseph Koerner, 'The Icon as Iconoclash', in: Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds.), *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, Karlsruhe / Cambridge, Mass. 2002, pp. 164-213, here p. 183.
[107] Coletti, 'Intorno ad un nuovo ritratto del vescovo Bernardo de' Rossi', p. 412.

the bishop and his most loyal collaborators, the vicar general Francesco Pampano, his notary Francesco Novello, and Broccardo Malchiostro.[108] Twenty years later, Malchiostro himself would become the central target. On 12 May 1523, a Brescian priest named Pietro Averoldi was officially charged for publicly menacing Malchiostro and desecrating church space. For some years Malchiostro had been entangled in a conflict with the man, for Averoldi had helped to spread rumour in Treviso that the Bolognese had torn bishop De' Rossi, at the time governor of Bologna – literally – to parts.[109] But now, as was the accusation, Averoldi had entered the cathedral during the celebration of Mass and in the choir, amidst all the canons, had assailed Malchiostro with an ornamental piece of wood he had removed from the church of S. Giovanni Battista, while shouting insulting cries. Without any regard for the sacred place, for the divine offices that were going on, or for the authorities, he would have exclaimed: 'you lie through your teeth' (*tu menti per la golla*)![110] It seems that, despite several re-hearings and fines imposed on the rebellious priest, in the end the case was not settled to Malchiostro's satisfaction.[111] And three years later, almost contemporaneous with the attack on the altarpiece, there was a new outburst of violence. As has already been mentioned above, on 30 April 1526 a number of armed men had assailed canon Locatelli when he descended from the house of canon Salomone; and Locatelli himself confirmed to have recognized among the aggressors one of his fellow canons.[112] It is clear that the diocese was regularly afflicted by violence; and that the violence shown towards Malchiostro's portrait had a parallel in violence towards members of the chapter, among whom Malchiostro himself.

[108] Biscaro, 'Il dissidio tra Gerolamo Contarini podestà e Bernardo de Rossi vescovo di Treviso, especially p. 32 and further.
[109] Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', pp. 54-56. The news even reached Venice, as was reported by Marin Sanudo (12 December 1521): 'Fo divulgato per la terra una nova, qual zà 3 zorni la fo dita, ma par ozi sia stà confirmata, et par vegni per via dil Legato per certo prete venuto di Bologna, come lo episcopo di Rossi, qual è di Treviso, che era Legato dil Papa in Bologna, dove ha fato severa justitia, era stà tagliato a pezi da' bolognesi; per il che sier Alvise Pisani procurator, per la riserva dil Papa l'ha suo fiol cardinal, stete molto ocupato per tuor il possesso; ma inquerito ben la cosa, fo trovato nulla esser con fondamento.' Sanudo, *I diarii*, vol. II, p. 229. It seems relevant to mention that bishop De' Rossi's actual death, on 23 June 1527, occurred under suspicious circumstances (Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', pp. 34-35).
[110] Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 56 and doc. XXVI.
[111] Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 57.
[112] Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', pp. 59-60.

There is a well-known image from a ninth-century eastern manuscript in which the crucifixion of Christ and the destruction of his image are juxtaposed (fig. 49). In the crucifixion scene, a soldier has just pierced Christ's side with his lance; another soldier is offering him a sponge soaked in vinegar. It is just such a sponge on just such a long stick with which in the iconoclasm scene an image of Christ is being whitewashed.[113] The message is clear: whoever spoils an image of the Saviour is co-responsible for his death. The image is identified with what it represents; and its destroyers with Christ's murderers. It is interesting, then, that actual behaviour of early modern iconoclasts often mirrored the roles of the villains in contemporary Passion plays.[114] It was generally believed that Christ's tormentors and murderers were Jewish, and there was great anxiety that Jews would infiltrate Passion plays, eager as they allegedly were to crucify Christ once more. As Joseph Koerner shows, the extent to which iconoclasts, aiming to unmask the false images of papal religion, relied upon the 'scandal of all scandals,' Christ's murder by his own people, is striking.[115]

This only becomes understandable once we acknowledge just how deeply imbedded iconoclasm is in the Christian religion. At the heart of the Christian faith is the death of its god; through the death of Christ, son and true likeness of God, mankind is redeemed. One may object that Christ does not really die – or at least, that after three days he is resurrected. Yet, his Holy Wounds remain, as do the scars of the blows brought to images by iconoclasts. As Martin Warnke has shown, blows dealt to images were never arbitrary, and, what is more, led, as it were, to the creation of new images. Where facial features were removed, one could still see where the eyes, ears, nose and mouth once were; damage was consciously displayed – just as the wounds of the resurrected Christ, we might add, in other words (for example, fig. 50).[116] As if they were convicted criminals, sacred images were punis-

[113] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, pp. 157-158.
[114] Koerner, 'The Icon as Iconoclash', p. 174.
[115] Koerner, 'The Icon as Iconoclash', p. 174.
[116] For an instructive example, see Cornelius J. de Bruyn Kops, 'De Zeven Werken van Barmhartigheid van de Meester van Alkmaar gerestaureerd', *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 23 (1975), pp. 203-226.

hed – their eyes gouged out, their tongues pulled out, their genitals cut off, their limbs removed – but left 'alive,' so as to exhibit their shame and serve as warning.[117] A paradox therefore underlies both the ontology of the Christian image and its destruction: they are based on resemblance and dissemblance at the same time. In Koerner's words: 'In striking the crucifix, iconoclasts at once negate and repeat the likenesses cultivated in their target.'[118]

When attacking images of Christ as well as of 'normal' human beings, destroyers took recourse to, and were motivated by, rituals of violence usually performed upon living people. The punishment of criminals *in effigio* was applied sometimes in addition to, sometimes instead of, actual physical punishment. In *charivari* rituals, or popular rites of judgment and defamation, effigies were often used. *Charivari* rites were usually performed in case of improper sexual or marital behaviour and effigies could for example stand in for someone's dead spouse at the occasion of a second marriage. But *charivari* effigies were also borrowed for other rituals of shame, ridiculing unpopular figures such as the Pope (in the northern regions of Europe) or opposing religious groups in general by hanging or burning these images.[119] As to punishments in effigy, these were usually executed by government order; major artists were hired to paint shameful pictures of the condemned on the facades of public buildings. An impression of what things like these looked like may be gathered from a skilful drawing by the Florentine Andrea del Sarto of two men hanging upside down, one by a rope around his ankle (fig. 51).[120] Such practices were obviously meant to damage the image's prototype.

In this context it should be noted that the largest upheavals of image destruction in the early modern period, the campaigns of Protestant iconoclasm, played upon the perceived connections between images and their prototypes, too. While objecting to sacred images and the rituals in which these images played a central part, reformers themselves were inspired by these well-known processes of formal behaviour; for what else did they know? Drawing

[117] Martin Warnke, 'Durchbrochene Geschichte? Die Bilderstürme der Wiedertäufer in Münster 1534/1535', in: idem (ed.), *Die Zerstörung des Kunstwerks*, Frankfurt am Main 1988, pp. 65-98, here p. 91 and further.
[118] Koerner, 'The Icon as Iconoclash', p. 191.
[119] Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 1997, p. 98 and further.
[120] Samual Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment: Art and Criminal Prosecution during the Florentine Renaissance*, Ithaca and London 1985, p. 116. About ridiculizing images, see also Gherardo Ortalli, *La pittura infamante nei secoli XIII-XVI: "… pingatur in Palatio…"*, Rome 1979.

inspiration from the Carnival, itself already a parody on the normal way of things, they travestied official church rite.[121] This meant that sacred images were smeared with blood, dragged through the mud, hung upside-down, paraded down the streets in carnivalesque parades, taken to bathing houses, or decapitated. As Edward Muir argues, characteristic of these rituals of reform was the frequent interchangeability between images and living representatives of the old order. Both groups, the images on the one hand and Roman Catholic priests and monks on the other, were ritually humiliated and degraded, while both served as figures of the old system.[122] With Koerner one may ask, however, whether the iconoclasts not invested the images, while depersonalizing them, with a personhood they so strongly objected to.[123] Prerequisite for these violent reactions to images and priests alike was not their powerlessness; to the contrary, it was the belief in their great powers that made them potentially dangerous and their destruction necessary. Yet, paradoxically, in damaging an image, the iconoclast needed images as much as the iconodules did.[124]

Conclusion: Malchiostro's End

Let us return to Malchiostro's damaged image. Part of an artistically innovative, but badly understood ensemble, placed centrally in the altarpiece, frontally – as we have seen, in the manner of a sacred figure – and, not to forget, the representation of a loathed man, we might say that it was an easy target. Attacked with pitch and other filthy stuff, on the basis of the technical evidence it seems likely that the part of the painting depicting Malchiostro was indeed the most damaged. We can only guess at what it must have looked like immediately after the attack: a splendid altarpiece with Mary and the greeting angel, but with a big black stain in between. Just as nothing can escape a black hole in space, the painting's black hole could have escaped no-one's attention, looming large over the whole ensemble of the chapel; a not-to-neglect display of Malchiostro's depersonalization. In this regard, it is important that no other emblems of Malchiostro in the chapel were destroyed.

[121] Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, p. 185 and further; Koerner, 'The Icon as Iconoclash', p. 189.
[122] Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, p. 185 and further.
[123] Koerner, 'The Icon as Iconoclash', p. 179.
[124] Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*; Koerner, 'The Icon as Iconoclash', p. 183.

What happened in Treviso in 1526 does not belong to the category of *damnatio memoriae*; with all but one reference to the donor intact, it was utterly clear who was being defaced here; the survival of coats-of-arms, initials, inscriptions and so forth was vital to the operation's success. It is understandable, then, that the authorities decided to cover it all up and hide the damaged painting behind a curtain – although such a move would inadvertently have only increased the stain's attraction.[125]

When the attack took place, Malchiostro had been ill for a while. Until his death in 1529, he was never to recover.[126] Was there, then, a perceived connection between the assault on Malchiostro's image on the one hand and his failing health on the other? It cannot be denied that the attack was meant to inflict damage upon the portrait's prototype. But how exactly was this believed to work? Regarding early modern Italian executions in effigy, authors before me have argued that this was not meant to work by some magical procedure, but, rather, by a shameful attack on the convicted person's public persona.[127] I wonder, however, whether such a clear-cut distinction can be made, in particular for this period.

What could 'magic' mean, in this context? If we could ask the assailants, they would probably have denied the use of something like magic; as members of the clergy, they knew only too well that magic was something for old women, something illicit and dangerous, something for 'them', not for 'us'. Indeed, for the sixteenth-century Italian church, as for many art historians today, 'magic' is a pejorative term, associated with the irrational, the illicit, and the primitive. Yet the mechanisms used by the assailants may be more similar to voodoo or volt sorcery than we would like to think. If we analyze the unfortunate events in terms of agency, we see that the assault had indeed the desired effect: the much hated Malchiostro disappeared from the stage.

[125] It was altogether common that Venetian and Veneto altarpieces be equipped with curtains; their purpose was to cover the image during the season of Lent. Peter Humfrey mentions some altarpieces retaining their curtain rods on the top of their frames: for example, the anonymous *St Michael triptych*, Sta. Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (Humfrey, *The Altarpiece in Renaissance Venice*, pp. 6 and 51. It seems to me that the Treviso *Annunciation* is one of them, too: the curtain rod is clearly visible just above the polychrome inner frame.

[126] Liberali, 'Lotto, Pordenone e Tiziano', p. 60.

[127] Ernst H. Gombrich, 'Magic, Myth and Metaphor: Reflections on Pictorial Satire', in: id., *The Uses of Images*, pp. 184-211, here p. 190 and further; Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*, p. 171; Ortalli, *La pittura infamante*, chapter three.

In analyzing cases such as these, we should be aware of the differences between, firstly, elite and popular elements in a given culture, and, secondly, between theory and practice. The assailants, to be sure, were members of a certain elite – they belonged to the higher echelons of a diocese and must have been educated, cultured people, but, as scholars like Peter Burke have shown, this did not prevent them at all from taking part in popular culture, too.[128] Secondly, no-one was more aware than they were of the Roman Catholic decrees regarding images, involving, most importantly, that a represented person or deity is *not* in some way present in the image; that the deities represented in the image should be venerated, not the image itself. Yet, in assailing Malchiostro's donor portrait, the Trevisan clergymen ignored the theory, and chose for a solution that worked in practice. That this involved a work of what we, together with some of their contemporaries, now call 'art', surely did not matter to them.

[128] Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Aldershot 2009, pp. 12-15.

Excursus

'... maledetto il saper vostro... ' Titian and Poetic Iconoclasm

I have at length discussed the extent to which the design of the chapel, and in particular that of the altarpiece, may have given occasion to the violence inflicted upon Malchiostro's donor image. Regarding the role of the responsible artists, especially Titian, questions remain. As has been noted, Titian's name nor references to any other artist did come up in the relevant documents – the blame was on Malchiostro, so much is clear. He was the one who embodied the chapel, not some painter. Yet, it is an intriguing question how Titian would have responded to the attack, and it seems significant that he never again used a similar composition for his Annunciations, or placed a donor frontally. While art history has long been principally focused on the artist, we have already seen in the first chapter that in the earlier half of the sixteenth century the artist was regarded as a relatively unimportant agent in comparison with the prototype or the patron. However, in the course of the century the perceived role of the artist became more prominent, partially due, I would like to hypothesize, to the efforts of Titian himself.

There is a later instance of a kind of negative response to Titian paintings, in which his role as artist does receive attention. I am thinking of a group of poems written by the *poligrafo* Nicolò Franco against his former master, Pietro Aretino, writer and friend of Titian. These eleven sonnets satirize Aretino's love of having himself portrayed by the major artists of his time. I would like to briefly discuss Franco's 'anti-poems', not only in order to gain further insight into the artist's role in (poetic) iconoclasm, but also to look ahead at the second part of this study, in which poetic responses to painted portraits take centre stage.[129]

[129] Although much has been written on Aretino and Titian, and on Aretino and Franco, this specific group of poems has not yet received much scholarly attention. A very recent treatment of Titian and Franco, which pays some attention to the poems, is Grosso, *Per la fama di Tiziano nella cultura artistica dell'Italia spagnola*, chapter 4. For a reference to the poems in relation to

Before Nicolò Franco (1515-1570) broke with Aretino, he was assisting him with the edition of his letters. It has been argued that their conflict arose over the publication of Franco's *Pistole vulgari* (1539). Other scholars have stressed the immediate outcome of the conflict, with Franco accusing Aretino of blasphemy and also of sodomy – a very serious crime in sixteenth-century Venice.[130] But it was Franco who came off worst: sometime in 1539, a protégé of Aretino's wounded Franco with a knife in the face, and Franco had to flee Venice. For a period of seven years he retreated to Casale Monferrato in Piedmont where he wrote the *Rime contro Pietro Aretino et de la Priapea*, of which only the third, extended edition published in Basel in 1548 has come down to us.[131] Particularly the *Priapea* is strongly anticlerical in character; both works share a satirizing, often coarse tone, directed against the princes and other powerful men of Italy. In 1559, they were put on the *Index* of forbidden books. Aretino, their main victim, did not live long enough to see that happen, though.

In a way, Pietro Aretino was an easy target. We have already discussed the vulnerability of portrayed people generally. In sixteenth-century Venice, there was hardly, perhaps no other person at all who had himself portrayed as many times, and in such a wide range of media, as Aretino (for example, fig. 52).[132] Aretino was painted, both in independent portraits and as onlooker or performer in history paintings; he was sculpted, cut in wood, and, if we should believe the man himself, also represented on comb cases, on mirror

Titian's portrait of Aretino in the Frick Collection in New York, see Luba Freedman, *Titian's portraits through Aretino's lens*, University Park 1995, p. 39; also relevant is Waddington, *Aretino's Satyr*, particularly pp. 102-103.

[130] See D.B.I., vol. L, pp. 202-203, s.v. 'Franco, Nicolò'; for the accusations see Ian Frederick Moulton, *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England*, Oxford 2000, pp. 140-141.

[131] See also Roberto L. Bruni, 'Le tre edizioni cinquecentesche delle Rime contro l'Aretino e la Priapea di Nicolò Franco', *Libri tipografi biblioteche. Ricerche storiche dedicate a Luigi Balsamo*, vol. I, Florence 1997, pp. 123-143.

[132] For a survey of Aretino's portraits, see Lora Anne Palladino, *Pietro Aretino: Orator and Art Theorist*, diss. Yale University 1981, pp. 170-175. For Aretino and Titian, see Freedman, *Titian's portraits through Aretino's lens*. Regarding the printed portraits in books, Christopher Cairns questions Aretino's involvement. Usually presented as part of Aretino's programme of self-celebration, these author portraits (printed in Aretino's and others' publications) were, as Cairns argues, often re-used without Aretino's or the author's knowledge – a practice that continued until well after Aretino's death, into the seventeenth century (Cristopher Cairns, 'Pietro Aretino: The Distorted Frame', in: Hendrix and Procaccioli, *Officine del nuovo*, pp. 203-216).

frames, and on majolica plates.[133] The scale and sophistication of Aretino's public exposure were heretofore simply unseen; a fact of which he was clearly very fond.[134] In a sonnet written to accompany a yet to be painted portrait of himself, Aretino exclaimed: 'You who love virtue, look with cheerful face upon the mastery of Titian. And you who have made appalling vice your idol, close your eyes so that you do not see me, because, although I am painted, I speak and understand.'[135] But it was this same trust in the powers of lifelike portraiture that made Aretino vulnerable to the kind of mockery conceived by Franco. Let us look at one of the poems Nicolò Franco addressed to Titian:

Titian, all those who've looked
at Aretino, painted in your papers,
and who've considered, each of them apart,
that he shows to have spirit and breath,

Have generally cursed the one
who was the author and invented such art,
and have damned your skill to the extent that
you have formed him so lifelike and well.

And don't believe that they insult
your rare and divine genius
for having him portrayed accurately.

[133] '… come ho detto piú volte, ritorno a dire che oltre le medaglie di conio, di getto, in oro, in ariento, in rame, in piombo, e in istucco, io tengo il naturale de la effigie ne le facciate dei palazzi; io l'ho improntata ne le casse de i pettini, ne gli ornamenti de gli specchi, ne i piatti di maiolica, al par d'Alessandro, di Cesare, e di Scipio. E piú vi affermo, che a Murano alcune sorti di vasi di cristallo si chiamano gli Aretini. E l'Aretina nominasi la razza de gli ubini in memoria d'una che a me Clemente Papa, e io a Federigo Duca diedi. Il rio de l'Aretino è battezzato quel che bagna un de i lati de la casa ch'io abito sul gran Canale. E per piú crepaggine de i pedagoghi, oltra il dirsi lo stile Aretino, tre mie cameriere e massare, da me partite e signore diventate, si fanno chiamare l'Aretine.' Aretino, *Lettere*, vol. III, no. 229, pp. 214-215, here p. 215.

[134] As Lora Palladino has it, he 'relished this means of subverting decorum.' Palladino, *Pietro Aretino*, p. 174.

[135] 'Chi ama la virtù con faccia lieta,/ Di Tizian contempli il magistero.// E quel ch'idol s'ha fatto il vicio orrendo/ Chiudi aper non vedermi gli occhi suoi,/ Ché, anchor ch'io sia dipinto io parlo e intendo.' Pietro Aretino, *Lettere sull'arte*, eds. Ettore Camesasca and Fidenzio Pertile, vol. III-1, p. 212. See also Palladino, *Pietro Aretino*, p. 191 and further.

For the people who hate him so much
would rather see him dead,
and you have made him seem alive.[136]

Franco is playing with the well-known topoi of poetic praise: Titian's portrait of Aretino is seen to have a spirit, it breathes, it is alive. Also, Titian has portrayed the sitter accurately, as he is (*ben formato*, *accorto*). Yet, the portrait's audience is not happy: they had rather seen the sitter dead. In the case of the much hated Aretino, a living image is not the highest ideal, but something that should be avoided. Anticipating the sitter's actual end, a death *in effigio* is what Titian should have aspired to.

Other poems do not go as far as to wish 'the Scourge of Princes' dead, but instead make use of erotically explicit writing as a satirical tool – and are therefore no less cruel. Let us take a look at the following sonnet:

Titian, you have portrayed Aretino,
and shown that he's the one and only
who in the middle of the Grand Canal keeps a brothel,
and who wrote the Nanna to the baboon;

Who does not know Latin and calls himself Divine,
who signs as 'Scourge of Asses',
who in sonnet-making rivals with Burchiello,
and who practices love-making either way.

Oh, if only you had rendered him
in that attitude which shows his back,
so that he seemed ready for a joust,

I would drop dead
if sometime in your life you'd have made a thing
which was more faithful to nature.[137]

[136] 'TITIANO, tutti quegli che han guardato/ L'Aretin pinto ne le vostre carte,/ E han considerato a parte a parte/ Ch'egli mostra d'haver lo spirto, e 'l fiato,// Hanno generalmente bestemiato/ Chi fu l'autore che trovo tal arte,/ E maledetto il saper vostro in parte,/ Per voi lhaver si vivo e ben formato.// Et non crediate che si faccia torto/ Al vostro ingegno pellegrin e divo/ Per esser stato nel ritrarlo accorto.// Per che la gente che l'ha tanto a schivo,/ Havrebbe a caro di vederlo morto,/ E voi pur fate che le paia vivo.' Nicolò Franco, *Delle rime … contro Pietro Aretino, et de la Priapea … terza edizione, colla giunta di molti Sonetti nuovi* (Basel, 1548), p. 23r.

This sonnet is surely no exception among the *Rime contra Pietro Aretino* in its being directed to a group of insiders. To fully understand the poem, the reader has to know, for example, about Aretino's dialogues on the sex lives of women, pastiches of the learned sixteenth-century dialogue treatise.[138] The reader should be versed in contemporary lyrical poetry, to see that Franco is in fact mocking the lyrical praises bestowed on the top painters of the time. A bit easier to grasp, however, is the sonnet's sexual overtone, which centres, as the other sexually explicit parts of Franco's *Rime*, on an accusation of sodomy (*quell'attitudine che mostra/ la schiena*). Framing the sonnet is the portrait Titian did not paint; the master's actual portraits of Aretino are too flattering to be real, the reader may surmise.

In this way, we may conclude, Franco painted lifelike, but threatening images of Aretino with words. Based on the Horatian dictum 'Ut pictura poesis', in more elevated genres it was common to claim that painting was much like poetry and poetry much like painting. Yet the same seems to have counted for the lower genres. So much is at least suggested by Aretino himself, as he revelled, he once wrote, in besmirching paper like others 'take pleasure in defacing (*imbrattar*) the white walls of hostelries.'[139] This chapter has hopefully made clear that iconoclasm, be it visual or verbal, was not merely symbolic – it had an impact that was very real.

[137] 'TITIAN, ritratto havendo l'Aretino,/ Mostrato havete, ch'egli e il vero, & quello/ Che in mezzo il Canal grande tien bordello,/ Et che scrisse la Nanna al Babuino,// Che non ha lettre, & chiamasi Divino,/ Che si scrive de gli Asini Flaggello,/ Che in sonettar concorre co'l Bruchiello,/ Et che fa l'arte a dritto, & a mancino.// O s'in quell'attitudine che mostra,/ La schiena havesse volta in guisa tale,/ Che ne paresse in punto per la giostra,// Cader possa in disgratia del male/ Se cosa haveste fatta in vita vostra/ Che havesse havuto piu del naturale.' Franco, *Delle rime contro Pietro Aretino*, p. 23r.

[138] '… che scrisse la Nanna al Babuino': Aretino dedicated his *Sei giornate*, dialogues with explicitly sexual explicit contents, 'al suo monicchio', an ambiguous phrase which may mean both 'to his monkey' and 'to his mistress'. Babuino was also one of Rome's speaking statues. As the inventor of the literary *Pasquinate*, or poetical utterings of another speaking statue, il Pasquino, Aretino indeed was Babuino's conversation partner.

[139] '… non so se non aprir la bocca e lasciare cader giuso a caso detti debili e parole inutili, faccendo con gli inchiostri ne le carte di quei segni che con i carboni fanno ne i muri bianchi de l'osterie colori che hanno piacere d'imbrattargli.' Aretino, *Lettere*, vol. I, no. 153, pp. 226-227, here p. 227. The reference is from Paul F. Grendler, *Critics of the Italian world (1530-1560): Anton Francesco Doni, Nicolò Franco & Ortensio Lando*, Madison, Wis. 1969, p. 8.

3

A Martyr of Painting

Irene di Spilimbergo, Titian, and Venetian Portraiture between Life and Death

> *Pygmalion's love for the figure of ivory, which was made by his own hands, gives us an example of those people who try to circumvent the forces of nature, never willing to enjoy that sweet and soft love that regularly occurs between man and woman. While we are naturally always inclined to love, those people give themselves over to love things that are hardly fruitful, only for their own pleasure, such as Paintings, Sculptures, medals, or similar things. And they love them so dearly that those same things manage to satisfy their desires, as if their desire had been satisfied by real Love that has to be between man and woman.*[1]
>
> Giuseppe Orologi, comment on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1578)

As Giuseppe Orologi, a writer with connections to Titian, makes clear in his commentary on Ovid's story of the sculptor Pygmalion, some people of his

[1] 'L'amore di Pigmaleone, alla figura di Avorio fatta da le sue mani, ci da essempio che quelli che tentano far riparo alle forze della natura, non volendo giamai gustare il dolcissimo, e suavissimo Amore posto regolatamente fra l'huomo, e la donna, essendo la volontà nostra naturalmente spinta per sempre ad amare, si danno ad amare alcune cose di poco frutto, solamente per proprio loro piacere, come Pitture, Sculture, medaglie, ò simil cose, e le amano cosi caldamente, che vengono le medesime cose, a satisfare al desiderio loro, come se rimanessero satisfatti del desiderio del vero Amore, che deve esser fra l'huomo, e la donna.' Giuseppe Orologi, 'Annotationi del decimo libro', in: *Le metamorfosi di Ovidio. Ridotte da Gio. Andrea dell'Anguillara in ottava rime* (Venice, 1610) [1578], p. 166.

time fell in love with beautiful things rather than human beings.[2] Some of Orologi's contemporaries had their desires satisfied not by a man or a woman but by works of art. The author laments what he considers to be an unfruitful type of love.

This chapter may be read as an illustration of Orologi's complaint, for we will focus on the loving celebration of the portrait of a young Venetian noblewoman. When she was hardly twenty-one years old, Irene di Spilimbergo, as she was called, died; and her family and admirers turned to her painted portrait and loved it in her stead. Whether this was unfruitful (*di poco frutto*), as Orologi has it, remains to be seen.

The case of Irene di Spilimbergo is a complex one. While we in the first two chapters have focused on paintings with a devotional function in a religious context, this third chapter is primarily about portraits in the secular sphere – although it will become clear that in early modern Venice, the sacred was never far away. Chapter One discussed a painting of Christ which was venerated as if it was Christ himself. In Chapter Two we treated the case of the attack on a donor portrait that was aimed towards the donor himself. In this chapter, the situation is less easy to grasp. Firstly, there is a very interesting *Portrait of Irene di Spilimbergo* which will be thoroughly examined (fig. 53, colour plate 3).[3] Being usually considered as the product of one of Titian's many followers, it will here be presented as bearing the marks of the master. Evidence of the portrait's reception, on the other hand, is relatively scarce. That it was treated as a surrogate of the real Irene is something that needs to be deduced; it is not immediately evident. Secondly, the case is complemented with a lot of literary material. When Irene di Spilimbergo died (1561), friends of hers composed a volume of poems in her memory (fig. 54).[4] This is a unique collection of lyrical poetry which discusses, among other topics, the power of painting to keep the dead alive. Thirdly, the rela-

[2] For Orologi, see Una Roman D'Elia, 'A Preliminary Catalogue of Writers with Connections to Titian' in: idem, *The Poetics of Titian's Religious Paintings*, Cambridge 2005, pp. 157-188, here p. 179.

[3] The portrait is in the collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. For basic information, see the Gallery's website, http://www.nga.gov/fcgi-bin/tinfo_f?object=1222 (last consulted on 13 June 2011).

[4] Dionigi Atanagi (ed.), *Rime di diversi nobilissimi, et eccellentissimi autori in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo. Alle quali si sono aggiunti versi latini di diversi egregij poeti, in morte della medesima signora* (Venice, 1561).

tions between Irene, her family, and their acquaintances in Venice are very well documented, which makes it possible to analyze the agendas of the people involved: who were interested in keeping Irene alive by means of this painted portrait, why were they interested, and with what results?

So far, the poetry collection in memory of Irene di Spilimbergo has mostly been studied from the perspective of Italian literary history.[5] This is no surprise, given that the volume contains no less than 279 Italian and 102 Latin poems lamenting the lady's untimely end, and thereby gives an almost complete overview of tendencies in Italian lyrical poetry of the time.[6] The poetry collection also includes a biography of Irene, and this, in turn, has been studied from the perspective of gender studies.[7] In the field of art history, however, the importance of the volume has largely been overlooked.[8] The present text is, therefore, also a first attempt to fill in this gap.

The poetic celebration of the liveliness of a painted portrait was certainly not new when applied in the memorial collection of Irene di Spilimbergo. At the time the poem collection was published, in 1561, praising the liveliness of paintings had become conventional, a topos. We have seen something of that

[5] Studies by literary historians include Giancarlo Sturba, 'Dionigi Atanagi redattore della "Vita d'Irene da Spilimbergo"', in: Bonita Cleri (ed.), *I Della Rovere nell'Italia delle corti*, Vol. III, Urbino 2002, pp. 37-50; Antonio Corsaro, 'Dionigi Atanagi e la silloge per Irene di Spilimbergo (Intorno alla formazione del giovane Tasso)', *Italica* 75 (1998), pp. 41-61; Giovanni Comelli, 'Irene di Spilimbergo in una prestigiosa edizione del Cinquecento con un carme latino di Tiziano', in: *Spilimbèrc*, eds. Novella Cantarutti and Giuseppe Bergamini, Udine 1984, pp. 223-236; Elvira Favretti, 'Una raccolta di rime del cinquecento', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 158 (1981), pp. 543-572; and Benedetto Croce, 'Irene di Spilimbergo', in: *Poeti e scrittori del pieno e tardo Rinascimento*, vol. I, Bari 1945, pp. 365-375.

[6] See Favretti, 'Una raccolta di rime del cinquecento', pp. 548 and 550.

[7] Anne Jacobson Schutte, 'Irene di Spilimbergo: The Image of a Creative Woman', *Renaissance Quarterly* (1991), pp. 42-61; also idem, 'Commemorators of Irene di Spilimbergo', *Renaissance Quarterly* 45 (1992), pp. 524-536. I consider Schutte's 1991 article the most important contribution on Irene di Spilimbergo so far, although I do not always agree with it.

[8] Fredrika Jacobs mentions the volume in her book on Renaissance women artists, which includes six sonnets in Italian as well as in English translation (see Fredrika H. Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance "Virtuosa": Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism*, Cambridge 1997, esp. pp. 178-182). Most recently, Irene di Spilimbergo has been discussed in Grosso, *Per la fama di Tiziano nella cultura artistica dell'Italia spagnola*, pp. 115-119, and Tagliaferro and Aikema, *Le botteghe di Tiziano*, pp. 62-63 and pp. 167-172. In the first half of the twentieth century, art historians concentrated on the paintings related to Irene di Spilimbergo; see Hans Tietze and Erika Tietze-Conrat, 'I ritratti di Spilembergo a Washington', *Emporium* 117 (1953), pp. 99-107; Corrado Ricci, 'Ritratti tizianeschi di G. Paolo Pace', *Rivista del R. Istituto d'Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte* 1 (1929), pp. 249-264; and Adolfo Venturi, 'Cronaca', *L'Arte* 14 (1911), p. 394.

in the Introduction, and, again, in the *Excursus* to Chapter Two.[9] Its conventionality, however, does not make a topos meaningless; what it shows us is that qualities like liveliness and lifelikeness were the most important requirements when paintings were concerned. In this context, an analysis of Irene di Spilimbergo and the poetry collection in her memory gives us a fine impression of ideas on this matter current around 1560. Such an analysis will show, to touch on one of the outcomes, that paintings were not only said to keep the dead alive, but also, rather terrifyingly, that they were capable of killing.

A key concept in the present chapter will be 'Petrarchism'. Petrarchism is the imitation of the works of the fourteenth-century Italian poet laureate Francesco Petrarca; most importantly of his *Canzoniere*, the sonnet sequence to his beloved but inaccessible lady Laura.[10] Petrarchism has always had a relation with the visual arts, because painting and drawing together provide the lover-poet with a surrogate of his beloved lady.[11] What is more, Francesco Petrarca counts as an adopted son of the Venetian republic. He spent the last years of his life in Venice and nearby Arquà, and the Venetians liked to consider his private library the foundation of their Biblioteca Marciana.[12] Petrarchism was the principal style in sixteenth-century Venetian poetry – so important, in fact, that it was impossible to think of any literary work beyond it. For the Venetian elites, it seems to have been much more than merely a

[9] See further, among others, Von Rosen, 'Die Enargeia des Gemaldes'; Rupert Shepherd, 'Art and life in Renaissance Italy: a blurring of identities?', in: Mary Rogers (ed.), *Fashioning Identities in Renaissance Art*, Aldershot 2000, pp. 63-78; Land, *The viewer as poet*; Mary E. Hazard, 'The Anatomy of "Liveliness" as a Concept in Renaissance Aesthetics', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 33 (1975), pp. 407-418.

[10] See Karlheinz Stierle, *Francesco Petrarca: Ein Intellektueller im Europa des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Munich and Vienna 2003.

[11] A selection of literature: Lina Bolzoni, *Poesia e ritratto nel rinascimento*, Bari 2008; Marianne Koos, *Bildnisse des Begehrens: Das lyrische Männerporträt in der venezianischen Malerei des frühen 16. Jahrhunderts – Giorgione, Tizian und ihr Umkreis*, Emsdetten and Berlin 2006, which, interestingly, studies male instead of female portraits; Joseph B. Trapp, 'Petrarch's Laura: The Portraiture of an Imaginary Beloved', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 64 (2001/2002), pp. 55-192; Patricia Simons, 'Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization: Ambiguous Individualism in Representations of Renaissance Women', in: Alison Brown (ed.), *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy*, Oxford 1995, pp. 263-311; Mary Rogers, 'Sonnets on Female Portraits from Renaissance North Italy', *Word and Image* 2 (1986), pp. 291-305; Alessandro Bevilacqua, 'Simone Martini, Petrarca, i ritratti di Laura e del poeta', *Bolletino del Museo Civico di Padova* 68 (1979), pp. 107-150; Elizabeth Cropper, 'On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, "Petrarchismo" and the Vernacular Style', *The Art Bulletin* 58 (1976), pp. 374-394.

[12] Even though Petrarch's collection did not stay in Venice and is now dispersed all over Europe; see Stierle, *Francesco Petrarca*, p. 454 and further.

literary style; in a society in which literature and art were not yet autonomous fields, Petrarchism was part of social life; Petrarch's last years spent in a villa in 'Petrarcadia' were an example to be followed.[13] One of the questions posed in this chapter is, therefore: to what extent was the Petrarchan topos of the beloved, inaccessible lady who comes alive in her painted image – here exemplified by Irene di Spilimbergo – grounded in social reality?

These are a lot of questions for a single chapter, to be sure. Our investigation of portrayed women and Petrarchan poetry will therefore be continued in the next and last chapter. For now, however, we will first further introduce Irene di Spilimbergo, her biography, and her untimely death. We will then proceed to her painted portrait and that of her sister Emilia, with which it forms a pair. An analysis of the remarkable authorship of these paintings and the roles they fulfilled in family life will gain further relief when juxtaposed to the second part of this chapter, which concentrates on the poem collection. We will see that poets from all over Italy helped to create a verbal picture of an ideal woman, that even now, in the twenty-first century, continues to stir the imagination.

Irene di Spilimbergo, Her Life and Death

The image one gets of Irene di Spilimbergo from her sixteenth-century biography is that of an extraordinary woman. Born and raised in the small mountain town of Spilimbergo, in the Friuli region, she seems to have been no less than a star when she died in Venice hardly twenty years later. The poem collection in her honour came into being not even a decade after she had first made her entry into the big city, and it was of heretofore unprecedented dimensions: never before had a mortal person, in Italy or abroad, been poetically celebrated on such a scale.[14] So who was this woman, and why this honour?

[13] For Petrarch's villa life in Arquà and the term 'Petrarcadia', see Stierle, *Francesco Petrarca*, pp. 471-472. For Petrarchism as a lifestyle, see also Gordon Braden, 'Applied Petrarchism: The Loves of Pietro Bembo', *Modern Language Quarterly* 57 (1996), pp. 397-423, and below, Chapter Four.

[14] The volume is preserved in more than twenty Italian libraries as well as in some major European and North-American collections: see Schutte, 'Commemorators of Irene di Spilimbergo', p. 524. This suggests it must have circulated widely. Another sixteenth-century example of the poetic celebration of an individual is the so-called *Coryciana*, a collection of 399 poems pub-

As a daughter of Adriano di Spilimbergo, one of the noble lords that ruled the town and region, and Giulia da Ponte, the only child of the wealthy Venetian Zuan Paolo da Ponte, Irene was born in the Friulan castle town on 17 October 1538.[15] It was also in this town that she was baptised and spent the whole of her childhood, the first three years with her parents, then, after her father's death on 12 September 1541, with her maternal grandparents.[16] She seems to have been the third of four children; the only one of whom, besides Irene, who made it into adulthood was Irene's elder sister and companion Emilia.[17]

The girls profited from a broad education. Their father had been a cultured man involved as he was in the foundation of an academy in his hometown Spilimbergo in which Latin, Greek, and Hebrew were taught. He also commissioned paintings from Antonio da Pordenone and Giovanni da

lished in Rome in 1524 in honour of the wealthy Luxembourger Johannes Goritz. The poems in this volume, however, focus more on Goritz's 'column' in the Roman church of S. Agostino than on the man himself, and were written during his lifetime. Goritz had an altar on one of the piers in the nave of the church. Above it was a fresco of the prophet Isaiah by Raphael; below it was Goritz's tomb; on the altar itself was Andrea Sansovino's sculpture of Saint Anne, the Virgin and the Christ child. Every year on Saint Anne's day Goritz had his humanist friends write poems on the ensemble, on Goritz's piety, and on the event itself; almost four hundred of these poems ended up in the volume edited by Blosio Palladio (see Blosio Palladio (ed.), *Coryciana* (Rome, 1524); see also Julia Haig Gaisser, 'The Rise and Fall of Goritz's Feasts', *Renaissance Quarterly* 48 (1995), pp. 41-57, with further bibliography).

[15] Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 43. The nineteenth-century sources, as well as Thieme-Becker, vol. XXXI, p. 378, state that Irene was born in Venice in 1540. Her sixteenth-century biographer mentions 1541 as her year of birth: Atanagi, *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo* (here, as in other cases, I do not refer to specific page numbers, for the biographic section of the poem collection has none). The correct data seem to be provided by Zuan Paolo da Ponte, Irene's grandfather, in his *Memoriali*, his unpublished diary and account book. For a discussion of the *Memoriali*, see Michelangelo Muraro, 'Il memoriale di Zuan Paolo da Ponte', *Archivio veneto* 44-45 (1949), pp. 77-88. See further Cesare Scalon, *La biblioteca di Adriano di Spilimbergo (1542)*, Spilimbergo and Udine 1988, p. 20, and Ruggero Zotti, *Irene di Spilimbergo*, Udine 1914, pp. 7-8 and 41.

[16] Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', pp. 43-44; Scalon, *La biblioteca di Adriano di Spilimbergo*, pp. 19-20.

[17] Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 44. Maria Teresa Acquaro Graziosi, however, mentions another grown-up sister, Isabella di Spilimbergo, but her identity is uncertain: see Maria Teresa Acquaro Graziosi (ed.), *Giordio Gradenigo: Rime e lettere*, Rome 1990, sonnet 19 and comments; also Zotti, *Irene di Spilimbergo*, pp. 30-31, who argues that one of the later children of Giulia da Ponte, a half-sister of Emilia and Irene, was called Isabella. For the family tree of this line of the Spilimbergo family, see Ferruccio Carlo Carreri, 'Tables généalogiques des Seigneurs de Spilimberg, Zuccula, Trus, Solimberg, etc., comtes palatins et chevaliers', *Giornale araldico-genealogico-diplomatico* 19-20 (1892), pp. 231-246, table V.

Udine.[18] Giulia da Ponte, the girls' mother, an equally educated person, maintained learned correspondences with men such as Giorgio Gradenigo, a Venetian patrician of whom later more. Giorgio Vasari called Giulia Titian's *comare* or family friend.[19] When Zuan Paolo da Ponte took over the care of his granddaughters after their father's death, he took their parents' education as an example and made sure that they were not only trained in such typical female activities as sewing and embroidery, but also in letters and in music.[20] This was rather uncommon for Italian noblewomen at the time and gave their education a slightly masculine touch.[21] When Irene reached the age of fifteen or sixteen, they all moved to Venice, where Zuan Paolo had their portraits painted by his namesake Zuan Paolo Pace.[22]

Regarding Irene di Spilimbergo's course of life, there are only very few verifiable facts. The available sources provide us with narratives. One such narrative is the biography which is part of Irene's memorial volume. This biography singles out Irene's precocity and her virtuousness. It tells us, for example, that already at a very young age, Irene did not consider needlework as something that could engage her all day. When her grandfather learned about this, he hired musicians to teach her how to play the lute, other

[18] Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 43; Acquaro Graziosi, *Giorgio Gradenigo*, p. 170; Fabio di Maniago, *Storia delle belle arti friulani, edizione seconda ricorretta e accresciuta*, Udine 1823, p. 125. In the castle of Spilimbergo are some fresco's by Pordenone: see Joseph Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, *Titian: his Life and Times with some Account of his Family*, vol. II, London 1877, p. 301. An important study of Adriano di Spilimbergo and his academy is Scalon, *La biblioteca di Adriano di Spilimbergo*.

[19] Acquaro Graziosi, *Giorgio Gradenigo*, p. 170; Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. VI, p. 168: 'Si veggiono anco ritratti di naturale da Tiziano un cittadino viniziano suo amicissimo, chiamato il Sinistri, et un altro nominato messer Paulo da Ponte, del quale ritrasse anco una figliuola che allora aveva, bellissima giovane, chiamata la signora Giulia da Ponte, comare di esso Tiziano…' Sansovino mentions Da Ponte in his section of Venetian writers: 'Giulia da Ponte, delle Signore di Spilimbergo, madre dela famosa et celebre Irene, fece diuerse lettere lodate, et poste in libri di diuersi scrittori.' Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima*, p. 281v.

[20] Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', pp. 44, 50-51; Luigi Suttina, *Appunti per servire alla biografia d'Irene di Spilimbergo. Estratto dagli* Atti dell'Accademia di Udine, Udine 1914, p. 7.

[21] From Da Ponte's *Memoriale*, on the way the sisters practiced music (as quoted by Suttina, *Appunti per servire alla biografia d'Irene di Spilimbergo*, pp. 7-8): '… in questa ne hanno fatto tal profitto et passato tanto inanzi, che si poteva dire che le sapeva molto più de quello che, come done, se gli conveniva…'

[22] On Pace, known either as 'Zuan Paolo' (= Venetian dialect) or 'Gian Paolo', see Tagliaferro and Aikema, *Le botteghe di Tiziano*, pp. 121-122 (about his position in Titian's workshop), p. 143 (Pace as an independent master), pp. 159-160 (Pace as an occasional collaborator of Titian's), and pp. 345-346 (Pace in Augsburg).

stringed instruments and how to sing, which soon made her very successful.[23] No less was Irene gifted in literature, according to her biographer. She read, albeit in vernacular translation, both contemporary and classical literature – Plutarch, Piccolomini, Castiglione, Bembo and Petrarch – and was widely known for her eloquence.[24] She loved to converse with honourable women and men, and to discuss literature and the arts, so that she might improve her knowledge no less than her manners. Although none of it has survived, her biographer claims she also was writing herself.[25] And as if all of this was still not enough, she became fascinated by the art of painting. Guided at first by one of her friends – the author of the biography calls her Campaspe – she

[23] Atanagi, *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*. A sign of her success may be found in her invitation to sing, together with her sister Emilia, for queen Bona Sforza of Poland, who passed through the Friuli region in March 1556, and was so pleased with the performance that she awarded both of them a golden chain. See Atanagi, *ibidem*, and Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', pp. 50-51; also Lina Bolzoni, *Il cuore di cristallo. Ragionamenti d'amore, poesia e ritratto nel Rinascimento*, Turin 2010, p. 12.
During the same visit, Queen Bona also had the pleasure to meet another Venetian woman of letters, Cassandra Fedele (1465-1558), by then ninety-one years old, who recited a Latin oration (Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 51). It is an attractive idea that the two women may have met; Irene, young and full of promises; the other one, Cassandra, old, wise, at the end of a long life, in many ways precursor and example to Irene. When Fedele had her age, Giovanni Bellini painted a portrait of her, about which she wrote the following lines: 'Calcavi quae omnes optant meliora secuta/ Iam celebris, passim docta, per ora vagor./ Bellinusque minor me priscis aemulus arte/ Et vivis studio rettulit effigie.' Published in Giacomo Filippo Tomasini, 'Cassandrae Fidelis vita', in: Cassandra Fedele, *Epistolae et Orationes*, ed. Giacomo Filippo Tomasini (Padua, 1626), p. 21. According to Jennifer Fletcher, Fedele recited this poem in front of the Doge and of Angelo Poliziano (Jennifer Fletcher, 'Bellini's Social World', in: Peter Humfrey (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Giovanni Bellini*, Cambridge 2004, pp. 13-47, here p. 36). See further Cassandra Fedele, *Letters and Orations*, ed. and translated by Diane Robin, Chicago and London 2000; Cesira Cavazzana, 'Cassandra Fedele erudita veneziana del Rinascimento', *Ateneo Veneto* 29 (1906), pp. 73-91; and Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima*, p. 6r, for more general information on Cassandra Fedele.
[24] *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*.
[25] 'Ella leggeva, non come il più delle donne, et anco de gli huomini fanno, per semplice passatempo, o come a caso; ma con giuditioso, e particolare avvertimento delle materie, che trattano, de concetti, e delle elocutioni: osservando tuttavia, e facendo estratti delle cose più belle: con fissa application d'animo al servirsi di loro, cosi nella creanza, e ne costumi, come ne ragionamenti, e ne gli scritti.' See also Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 51, and Zotti, *Irene di Spilimbergo*, pp. 16-17. Irene's writing activities are also recalled in several poems: see Ferrante Carrafa's contributions: 'Cantò la bella Irene, io piango e moro:/ Pinse, et io pingo in me l'horror di morte:/ Scrisse, et io scrivo, ahi lasso, hor l'empia sorte,/ Con cui vivendo ognihor via più m'accoro.// Oprò la voce, io grido, e mi scoloro:/ Ella il pennel, un dardo io crudo e forte:/ Ella la penna, et io lo stral, che'n forte/ Mi diede Amor, per farmi un del suo choro.' And: 'Col pennel, con lo stil, co i dolci accenti/ Pinse, scrisse, contò la bella Irene'. *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*, pp. 36-37.

started training herself in drawing and after a while mastered the art to such an extent that she managed to impress Daniele Barbaro, a well-known connoisseur, and even the great Titian himself.[26] Not much later, she was his student.

Our story actually begins when another comes to an end. In the autumn of the year 1559 fate struck for Irene. Her biographer relates that she managed to master proportion, light and shadow, foreshortening, anatomy, the softness and sweetness of flesh, and the handling of draperies; in short, all that a painter needs to know, within a period of only six weeks.[27] All this impressed the people around her, of course – she had more than lived up to the expectations aroused by her accomplishments in drawing. But perceiving her great physical effort, this 'excessive force of nature', her environment was also concerned and even feared for her health.[28] Unfortunately, these fears were not unjustified. Working from morning until evening in a chilly room, often opening the window to look at the break of day – and this in the last week of November, when cold and watery Venice is at its rainiest –, keeping eyes and mind fixed on her work without a moment of pause, Irene caught a fever accompanied by severe headaches.

While today we may not be much impressed by what may well have been a simple cold, in Irene's world doctors did not know what to do. Many physicians were called to her bed; some of them thought she had typhus, others held the opinion that she suffered from an abscess in the head; again others thought it was a fever. All these ideas notwithstanding, the medical profession

[26] For the identity of the first tutor, Campaspe, see Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance "Virtuosa"*, p. 166, and Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 53, n. 42. What seems to have been her father, Gigio Artemio Giancarli, was a poet and painter from Rovigo. Interestingly, 'Campaspe' was also the name of Alexander the Great's favourite concubine: when Alexander asked the painter Apelles to portrait Campaspe unclothed, the master fell in love with the beautiful girl, and when Alexander noticed this, he gave his mistress to the painter, and kept the portrait for himself. See Pliny, *Natural History* 35.36.86-7.

[27] 'Percioche in ispatio d'un mese, e mezzo, trasse copia d'alcune pitture del detto S. Titiano, con tanti particolari avertimenti alle misure, a lumi, alle ombre, a cosi a gli scorci, a nervi, alle ossature, alla tenerezza, e dolcezza della carni, e non meno alle pieghe de panni […].'

[28] '… che non solamente fece stupir coloro, che questa sopranatural forza videro; ma vi furon molti consideratori delle cose naturali maggior de gli altri, iquali vedendo in lei questo cosi grande, et eccessivo sforzo di natura, con un pungentissimo timore le agurorono la morte vicina.'

could not come to an agreement, let alone cure her, and twenty-two days after the onset of her illness, on 19 December 1559, Irene passed away.[29]

It was a devastating loss. Her family had to part with a granddaughter, daughter, and sister. 'I, Zuan Paolo da Ponte, son of messer Lodovico, have to make a record of the cruel, painful, and premature death of our dearest and sweetest Irene,' wrote her grandfather on the night she passed.[30]

> We were having good hopes for her health when a most extreme lethargy came over her and, as she was already fatigued and exhausted by her first illness, in less than four days she was robbed of it. And it bereaved us of the most glorious fruit that Nature produced in a long time, and has left us in such grief and sorrowful anxiety that we do not know where to go to find peace.[31]

Irene's untimely end also meant that her family was deprived of Irene's social, political, and biological potential. To put it less academically: never again would she bring intellectuals and artists together; there would never come a moment when she would marry; never would she be a mother. Irene di Spilimbergo's life came to an end at that moment when early modern women usually got married, and marriage offered an important opportunity for families to forge alliances.[32] Her grandfather Da Ponte, a wealthy merchant from Venice's *cittadino* class, would probably not have been particularly interested

[29] 'Or fosse, qual si volesse, la pestifera qualità del suo male; ella nello spatio di ventidue giorni, come virtuosamente era vivuta, cosi religiosamente, si morì, con pianto universale di ciascuno, che la vide, o sentì ricordare.' For the day of death, see also Maniago, *Storia delle belle arti friulani*, doc. CXVII. For the medical treatment Zuan Paolo da Ponte ordered for his granddaughter, see Suttina, *Appunti per servire alla biografia d'Irene di Spilimbergo*, pp. 11-12. His account makes clear his desperation.

[30] 'Dovendo jo Zuan Paolo da Ponte, fo de messer Lodovico, far una memoria della crudel, acerba et inmatura morte dela nostra carissima et dolcissima Irene…' Suttina, *Appunti per servire alla biografia d'Irene di Spilimbergo*, p. 5.

[31] '… erevamo in grandissima speranza de la sua salute, gli sopragionse una sonolentia così esstrema [sic] et trovatala stracca et sbatuta dal primo male, in men de giorni 4 ce la robò, et lassateci privi del più glorioso fruto, che già molti anni facesse la Natura et in tanto cordoglio et dogliosi affanni, che non sapemo in qual latto vogliersi per trovare pace…' Suttina, *Appunti per servire alla biografia d'Irene di Spilimbergo*, p. 5.

[32] On marriage practices in sixteenth-century Venice, see Alexander Cowan, *Marriage, Manners and Mobility in Early Modern Venice*, Aldershot 2007; Daniela Hacke, *Women, Sex and Marriage in Early Modern Venice*, Aldershot 2004; Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice*, New York 1985.

in more money – of that he had enough; it is more likely that he was after a patrician party for his granddaughters, as was not only befitting to their noble Spilimbergo blood, but would also have added lustre to his own name.[33] Next to that, Irene had already shown her power to attract cultured people, a quality that Da Ponte was particularly fond of, given the effort he had spent on providing his daughter and granddaughters with a decent literary and musical education.[34] Irene thus embodied the promise of being at the centre of attention in a flowering cultural milieu, of becoming a matron of the arts, and, certainly not less important, a mother. But when she passed, these expectations were in the crudest manner cut off. Or were they?

I will argue that, while Irene had died and with her life, her power to act came to an end, the story of her portrait shows how, after her death, the painting became her substitute, and thus was a means to continue her agency in this world. For as Leon Battista Alberti had already said, portraits were capable of keeping the faces of the dead alive.[35] As Irene di Spilimbergo can, I believe, be considered a mediator between her own and other families, and between all those cultural agents, writers, musicians, painters that she surrounded herself with, her painted portrait was a tool to continue functioning in this role even after she had passed away. The poem collection *cum* biography worked in more or less the same manner. In other words, after Irene di Spilimbergo's death both painting and poetry worked together to preserve, or perhaps even strengthen her agency, her power to act as mediator. Her painted portrait as well as the poem collection – a portrait, I will argue, in its own right – thereby served as indices of a prototype that, by then, was long gone to take her place at God's side.

[33] Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 44; Scalon, *La biblioteca di Adriano di Spilimbergo*, pp. 19-20.

[34] Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 44. Da Ponte himself participated in the Spilimbergo Academy, co-founded by his son-in-law, and was a lover of contemporary vernacular literature and of music.

[35] 'A questo modo i volti de i morti per mezzo de la pitttura in un certo modo vivono una vita molto lunga.' Leon Battista Alberti, *La pittura … tradotta per Lodovico Domenichi* (Venice, 1547), p. 18r. Here, as elsewhere, I refer to Lodovico Domenichi's Italian translation of Alberti's text, which was immediately followed by the publication of a number of newly written texts on painting: Paolo Pino's *Dialogo di pittura* (1548), Michelangelo Biondo's *Della nobilissima pittura* (1549) and Lodovico Dolce's *Dialogo della pittura* (1557). The latter even mentions Domenichi's translation of Alberti (Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura*, p. 159).

The Washington Portraits of Emilia and Irene

We will now turn to the one and only undisputed portrait of Irene di Spilimbergo, which is in the collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C (fig. 53, colour plate 3).[36] We will study it alongside the portrait of Irene's sister Emilia in the same collection, for reasons that will soon become clear (fig. 55). What do the portraits look like? What were their functions? And who was responsible for them? That the portraits known as *Irene* and *Emilia di Spilimbergo* are indeed depictions of these two persons and not of some other young women, whose identities are unknown to us, is confirmed by the complete provenance of the two paintings, which remained in the family until the beginning of the twentieth century.[37]

The *Portrait of Irene di Spilimbergo* shows us the three-quarter figure of a young woman, depicted almost life-size, her left arm loosely leaning against an architectural backdrop of which the large, plain column standing on a pedestal on the far right is the most conspicuous item. The other half of the background is taken up by a deep view on a hilly landscape, with in the foreground green meadows where a unicorn is resting, a sign of the sitter's virginity, behind it a dog chasing a hare, and the figure of a man near a tree watching while the animals go by (fig. 58). Behind this is an area with bushes and trees, and in the far background, in front of a screen of rocky mountains, there is the suggestion of a village or castle, perhaps that of Spilimbergo even,

[36] There is also a possible portrait of Irene di Spilimbergo in a private collection in New York. See Harold E. Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian: Complete Edition*, vol. II, *The portraits*, London 1971, cat. no. 99, p. 141.

[37] The portraits ended up by inheritance in the collection of Niccolò d'Attimis, Count of Maniago, who sold them in 1909. After they quickly changed owners a number of times, they were inherited in 1915 by Joseph E. Widener who donated his estate to the National Gallery in 1942. See http://www.nga.gov/fcgi-bin/tinfo_f?object=1221&detail=prov for Emilia and http://www.nga.gov/fcgi-bin/tinfo_f?object=1222& detail=prov for Irene (last consulted on 13 June 2011). In the past, there has been some confusion regarding the identity of the sitter in the painting nowadays called *Emilia di Spilimbergo*: it has been suggested that the painting actually depicts Isabella, sister of Irene and Emilia (see n. 17). This is suggested by the sonnet titled 'Mentro che Tizian la mano e l'arte' in Dionigi Atanagi (ed.), *De le rime di diversi nobili poeti …, libro secondo* (Venice, 1565). Emmanuele Cicogna also argued that the portrait was Isabella's (Cicogna, *Delle inscrizioni veneziani*, vol. II, pp. 37-38); Maniago, however, published a document that states that Isabella died on 12 October 1543, that is, at a young age and long before the two Washington portraits were painted (Maniago, *Storia delle belle arti friulani*, doc. CXVII: '1543. 12. Octobris. Moritur Isabella.'). The current identification of the sitter with Emilia therefore seems correct.

glimmering in the light of the late afternoon. The greyish sky, filled with dramatic clouds hanging over the mountain tops form a beautiful contrast with the sharp outline of the face and collar of the young woman, who, however, does not really seem to be aware of what is happening behind her in the landscape, nor seems to be a part of it in any other way – it rather gives the impression of a portrait picture taken in a studio, the decor of the landscape a later artificial addition. The light in the picture's foreground, the area where the woman is standing, comes from the front, from where we, the spectators, are, and leaves only the smallest shadows on the figure's right side, to which she is slightly turned.

Irene does not make any eye contact with the viewer. Her facial features make the impression of a characteristic, hardly idealized portrait. Compared to Titian's *Flora* (Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi; fig. 56), his *Judith* (Rome, Galleria Doria Pamphilj), or, contemporary to the portrait of Irene, the *Portrait of a Girl with a Fan* (Dresden, Gemäldegalerie; fig. 57), to name just a few examples, all images of highly idealized women, to be sure, Irene as depicted in the Washington portrait has a weak, receding chin, thin, somewhat compressed lips, a tip-tilted nose and a square, perhaps too large forehead (fig. 59). Her clear, white skin, long elegant neck, the light blushes on her cheeks, and her blond to reddish hair, on the other hand, are typical of the ideal of female beauty of the time.[38] In her clothing and jewellery she is showing the wealth of her family. She is wearing pearls in her hair and round her neck, another costly jewel in her ear, and a shimmering girdle round her waist. Over a red dress, on the borders of which appear white and black piping, is a reddish, glossy mantle, decorated with embroidering, the waistbelt kept in her right hand. In her left hand Irene is holding a laurel crown, next to which, on the stone pedestal, are inscribed the words 'SI FATA TVLISSENT' ('if the fates had allowed'); an obvious reference to her untimely death and the many talents that had so little time to flower (fig. 60). Perhaps Irene's most conspicuous attribute in this painting is standing against the column behind her left shoulder: a palm branch (fig. 61).

[38] Important studies on the contemporary ideal of feminine beauty have been written by Elizabeth Cropper; see 'The Beauty of Women: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture', in: Margaret W. Ferguson (ed.), *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1986, pp. 175-190, and 'On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, "Petrarchismo" and the Vernacular Style'.

In its overall composition, the portrait of Irene di Spilimbergo is not unlike other Venetian portraiture produced at the time. In fact, already during the 1520s Titian had developed a portrait type, consolidated in the following decades, that, because of its tremendous success, would be followed by many other Venetian painters, of which Irene's portrait seems to be a case in point. This portrait type contains a half length or three-quarter length standing figure, the body turned off-front and the sitter often making eye contact with the viewer – in this sense Irene's portrait is atypical (for example, fig. 62).[39] Other characteristics are a relatively subdued use of colour, nearly life-size depiction of the sitter, and a dignified, flattering representation. More than two dozen portraits of this type painted by Titian have survived, including some of female sitters.

Although the portrait of Irene clearly fits into the category just described, it also contains some anomalies. The landscape, for example: Titian often used views on landscapes in his portraits, but this was never a view from top to bottom; the landscape is rather seen through a window, a wall closing off the view down the sitter's waist. Also the fact that the landscape takes up half the background breadthwise is unusual.[40] The column is not often used either, and certainly adds to the woman's dignity and regal outlook.[41] I will not even go into the palm here, an attribute normally associated with saints and their martyrdoms. A final irregularity – or perhaps merely a flaw – is the rigidity of Irene's attitude, who refrains from making contact with the viewer, and whose stiff body is far removed from the lively dynamics of the best of Titian's vibrating figures.

Let us now take a look at the *Portrait of Emilia di Spilimbergo*. The painting is very similar to *Irene* in its general composition. The portrayed woman is standing in a room, in front of a segmented wall, her left hand leaning on what is most likely the windowsill. Behind her there is an opening overlooking a seascape with a turbulent sea, raging wildly against the shore, and a ship

[39] Frederick Ilchman recently characterized this type as the 'Titian formula': idem (ed.), *Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese: Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, Farnham 2009, pp. 206-209.

[40] Among other Titian portraits containing a view on a landscape are *Eleonora Gonzaga, duchess of Urbino* (Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi), *Count Antonio Porcia* (Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera), and *Pietro Bembo* (Naples, Museo di Capodimonte).

[41] The column is hardly ever used with non-noble sitters. See *Giacomo Doria* (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum), *Emperor Charles V, seated* (Munich, Alte Pinakothek), but, on the other hand, *Benedetto Varchi* (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum).

that has a hard job to keep its masts up. The sky is dark with clouds, although a little sunbeam peeps through. Emilia does not watch the scene behind her, but looks in our direction. Her face is very characteristic with its small chin, thin upper lip and long, pronounced nose (fig. 64). Other similarities between the two portraits can be found in the clothes, which are the same, and the way both sitters clutch the waistbelts of their mantles with their right hands. With Emilia standing slightly turned to her left, the viewer's right, and Irene just in the opposite direction, the two portraits are, indeed, perfect pendants.

What were these pendants meant for? Both of the portraits may have been destined for when the girls would be betrothed and married. Both young women had reached the marriageable age at the moment of portrayal (c. 1555); the portraits could have been used to present them to possible partners, as gifts to their intended husbands or families-in-law. It was quite normal that portraits of rich young ladies were produced to this end.[42] Another possibility is that the portraits were intended for those whom the girls left behind when they married: their Spilimbergo relatives. Indeed, Emilia's portrait, just like that of Irene, always remained in the family estate.

Still, it is interesting that the two sisters are depicted in such a similar way. A few scholars even believed that both paintings represent Irene; however, this view remains an exception.[43] Literary sources contemporary to the paintings reflect the way in which the sisters have been represented: as if they were one and the same person. Their grandfather wrote in his diary:

> … because everyone knew of this unity of theirs, they never let themselves be seen – at home or outside – if not dressed in the same fabric, in the same colour and form, to confirm in the minds of everyone their conformable unity.

[42] See also Alison Wright, 'The Memory of Faces: Representational Choices in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Portraiture', in: Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin (eds.), *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 86-113, here pp. 91-92; see also Ilchman, *Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese*, p. 216.

[43] See the file on the *Portrait of Irene di Spilimbergo* (accession no. 1942.9.83) in the Department of Curatorial Records at the National Gallery of Art: a memorandum written by S. Grossman (dated 11 June, 1976) conveys that Philip Sohm, fellow of the Gallery at the time, held the view that both paintings were posthumous portraits of Irene.

And how they, *pari passu*, walked through the same street, of one will and mind and hope…[44]

And in the poem collection for Irene, we find the following lines, composed by one Vincenzo Giusto:

And in the face of Emilia, and in the serene
eyes, both of them containing equal grace,
you can still admire your Irene.[45]

A Curious Genesis

With the sad event of Irene's death, something for the portraits must have changed, too. Not only became Emilia, as the poet Giusto has it, a living memory of her sister; both their painted images also underwent a change. When Irene died, her portrait could no longer be used in the context of betrothal and marriage. Irene's relatives were well aware that portraits not only served to present the sitter's features to a future partner, but that they were also capable of keeping the faces of the dead alive. In other words, Irene's painted portrait could change its function: from now on it would commemorate her.[46] As I will show, it seems that the painting was even adapted for this change of function, and that of Emilia, too.

Firstly, something needs to be said at this point about the portraits' curious genesis. As has been mentioned above, they were painted shortly after the family arrived in Venice. That this is not the whole story, however, is likely

[44] '… perchè cosi anche da tutti fusse cognossuta questa lor unione, mai se lasarno veder nè in casa nè for a, se non vestite d'un medesimo pano, d'un medesimo color et forma per confermar negli animi a tuti la conforme union loro et como pari passo camminavano per una instessa strada d'un medesmo voler et animo et una istessa speranza…' Suttina, *Appunti per servire alla biografia d'Irene di Spilimbergo*, p. 9.

[45] 'E d'Emilia nel volto, e nel sereno/ Lume di gratie eguali in ambe sparte/ Mirar potete anchor la vostra IRENE.' *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*, p. 165.

[46] Giorgio Vasari recalled in the second edition of his *Vite* how the portrait as a memorial had been introduced in Venice: 'Rimaso Giovanni [Bellini] vedovo di Gentile, il quale aveva sempre amato tenerissimamente, andò, ancorchè fusse vecchio, lavorando qualche cosa, e passandosi tempo: e perchè si era dato a far ritratti di naturale, introdusse usanza in quella città, che chi era in qualche grado si faceva o da lui o da altri ritrarre; onde in tutte le case di Vinezia sono molti ritratti, e in molte de' gentiluomini si veggiono gli avi e padri loro insino in quarta generazione, ed in alcune più nobili molto più oltre: usanza, certo, che è stata sempre lodevolissima, eziandio appresso gli antichi.' Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. III, pp. 438-439.

for several reasons. In the first place, there is a fragment from the *Memoriali* written by Zuan Paolo da Ponte which suggests so much.[47] On 28 June 1560, about half a year after his granddaughter had passed, he added the following passage to his diary:

> 28 June, 1560… I sent for *messer* Titian for the work he has done on the portrait of the already blessed memory of Irene, which was sketched rather badly by *messer* Zuan Paolo Pace and left imperfect for two years, so that it still remained so when the poor girl passed to the better life. But *messer* Titian, out of friendship for me, undertook the task to finish it and conjoined it so that one can certainly say that if she had been present, one could not have wished for something better. I sent him six Venetian ducats and he was so kind to be satisfied with it, though he deserves much more.[48]

This diary fragment suggests that Da Ponte asked Titian after his granddaughter's death to finish, or retouch the portrait, in order to make it better. That in contrast with Pace, Titian's achievement was all that Da Ponte had hoped for, is not only evident from the passage just quoted but also from a later remark: 'Titian, having her effigy in his mind, has finished and forged her so

[47] These *Memoriali* are a combination of diary and account book. Nowadays they are still in the possession of descendants of the family living in Venice, and consist of at least six manuscript volumes, of about four hundred pages each, and are largely unpublished. See *Tiziano ritrovato: il ritratto di messer Zuan Paulo da Ponte*, Venice: Antichità Pietro Scarpa 1998; Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 43; and Muraro, 'Il memoriale di Zuan Paolo da Ponte'.

[48] 'Giugno 28, 1560… mandai a messer Tutian per l'opera per lui fata nel retrato della nostra già benedetta memoria d'Irene abozata assai malamente da Ser Zuan Paulo de Pase et lassata imperfetta per dui anni si che rimase ben che la poverina andò a miglior vita. Ma Messer Tutian per me gratia si tolse il cargo di volerlo finir et conzata talmente che si può dir per certo che se fusse sta presente meglio si non poteva desiderare. Gli mandai ducati 6 viniziani et per sua cortesia se à contenta che merita assai più…' Quoted after Tietze and Tietze-Conrat, 'I ritratti di Spilembergo a Washington', p. 100. See also Ricci, 'Ritratti tizianeschi di G. Paolo Pace', and Venturi, 'Cronaca'. The authenticity of the fragment is somewhat disputed, though. First published by Ferruccio Carlo Carreri, it could not be traced by Hans Tietze and Erika Tietze-Conrat, who noticed that the pages in question had been torn out from the *Memoriali*, and that the table of contents only mentions Pace, not Titian. On the basis of the pictorial evidence, however, they still argue that the contents of the diary fragment are essentially true, and that Titian has indeed retouched the portrait of Irene, but not that of Emilia. They refer to Lodovico Dolce's sonnet 'Pon Titian ogni maggior tua cura', which I discuss below, as additional evidence for their thesis: written sometime between December 1559 and the publication of the memorial volume in 1561, the poem would suggest that Titian had not yet worked on Irene's portrait.

that would he have had her present he could not have done it better.'[49] So, while Pace in the eyes of Da Ponte had left a rather rough draft, Titian finished the portrait so convincingly as if Irene had been present in front of him.

Now this is an extraordinary story. One of two portraits commissioned from Pace, a minor artists working in Titian's manner, would have been improved by Titian himself, at the time already an absolute star. This runs counter to the usual procedure in painters' workshops: the master would start a portrait and his assistants would finish it. Nevertheless, as Tagliaferro and Aikema argue, from the 1540s onwards Titian seems to have re-organized his workshop in a way aiming towards the 'Spilimbergo-model'.[50]

There is another reason for believing Irene's portrait really was finished by another painter after the sitter's death. This is the inclusion of two elements that would have made no sense while the woman was still alive: the palm and the inscription. To the meaning of these two attributes I will pay attention later on in this chapter, when we have learned more about their literary context; for now it suffices to say that the palm, generally connected to martyrdom, signifying the victory over death, and the inscription 'if the fates had allowed', another reference to the sitter's premature end, would be meaningless, or perhaps rather morbid, for a woman in the prime of her life. What is more, close examination of the painting as well as the X-ray photograph indicates that at least the palm is a later addition; it is painted over the column and seems, therefore, not to have been conceived from the start (fig. 63).[51]

Although Da Ponte's diary remains silent about the portrait of Emilia, that painting seems to have undergone changes as well. Long ago, Joseph Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle already proposed that the ship on the stormy sea in the background of Emilia's portrait alluded to her sister's death; technical examination now confirms their idea (fig. 65). For it is clear that the ship has been changed: it used to be more upright and its sails used to be hoisted (fig. 66). The clouds, too, give evidence of *pentimenti*. All of this points in one direction: that originally, there was no storm.

[49] Tietze and Tietze-Conrat, 'I ritratti di Spilembergo a Washington', p. 100.
[50] Tagliaferro and Aikema, *Le botteghe di Tiziano*, pp. 62-63.
[51] For this and what follows, I refer to the curatorial records of the portrait of Irene and Emilia, as kept in the National Gallery of Art.

To be sure, both portraits are in a seriously bad condition, which makes conclusive statements about their genesis and attribution almost impossible. The paint surfaces have been heavily abraded; a large part of what currently meets the eye is the result of not so sensitive overpaintings. The technical evidence does confirm, however, that both paintings originated in the same workshop, and that both of them were made in a clumsy wet-in-wet technique (which resulted in the bad condition of which we are speaking). An accomplished painter like Titian would certainly not have started the portraits in such a way; but if he would have been confronted with them at a later stage, he could not have done a thing about it.[52]

All in all, the pictorial and technical evidence allows for a situation in which two painters, or workshops, were involved, first a minor, and later a major; these may be identified with Zuan Paolo Pace and Tiziano Vecellio. Most importantly, their respective involvement thereby not only would have marked two separate phases in the production of the paintings, but also two different functions of the portraits, and, finally, the life and death of one of the sitters.

Titian's Authorship

'Take the most possible care, Titian,' writes Lodovico Dolce in a contribution to Irene's poem collection, 'to lively portray her in a living, life-giving design'.[53] His sonnet is an appeal to Titian, arguably the best Venetian portraitist of the sixteenth century, to paint the deceased's image in a manner heretofore never seen. Dolce continues:

> As nature never let
> a more beautiful thing in this low kingdom,
> so is the subject, which overshadows the most famous ones,
> only worthy of your hand.

[52] I here paraphrase Joanna Dunn, assistant painting conservator at the National Gallery of Art, with whom I discussed and studied the Spilimbergo portraits on 14 January, 2010.

[53] These are the first and third line of the first stanza. The whole first stanza reads: 'Pon Titian ogni maggior tua cura/ Et unisci i color, l'arte, e l'ingegno/ Per ritrar viva in vivo almo disegno/ Lei, che ne tolse morte acerba e dura'. *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*, p. 121.

Represent her divine and celestial face,
the gold, the roses, and the bright white ivory,
and may her eyes really, not fictively, shine.

So that you will not only surpass those that you have surpassed here,
but that, of all the work that you will ever make,
this will be the most rare and most perfect.[54]

Only Titian is up to the task of portraying the most beautiful person nature has ever created, as Dolce argues. In my view, this sonnet should best be read independently from the Washington portraits, with which Titian would most likely have been finished around the time Dolce was writing.[55] I am discussing the latter's poem for the way it constructs an image of Titian as supreme *auctor*. The poet expresses his hope that the artist will not only emulate works of other painters – which Titian, of course, has already done – but also his own, so that he may show Irene's golden locks, her rosy cheeks and her fair skin and let her real eyes shine.

Dolce's sonnet can be understood within the discourse on the art of painting in Venice around mid-century; indeed, as we have seen, Lodovico Dolce himself was one of the principal participants in this debate. Dolce's poem first asks Titian to invest the painting with life, to compensate, as is the suggestion, for the life that is lost. Secondly, the enumeration of Irene's physical qualities in terms of Petrarchan metaphors like 'gold' and 'roses' makes clear that the portrait should be the depiction of an ideal of female beauty. Titian thus should portray Irene in a painting that is at the same time alive and ideal. As we will see, these two demands turn up again and again in discussions around Irene.

But why, the reader may wonder, all this fuss over the paintings' attribution? Have we not seen in the two preceding chapters that most people using paintings in Venice at the time did not bother at all about their makers? On the other hand, I have also shown how, later in the century, a successful mi-

[54] 'Che come non fermò giamai natura/ Cosa piu bella in questo basso regno/ Cosi'l soggetto è solamente degno/ De la tua man, ch'i piu famosi oscura.// Rappresenta il divin celeste aspetto/ L'oro, le rose, e'l terso avorio bianco/ E splendan gli occhi suoi veri, e non finti.// Che non pur vincerai quei, c'hai qui vinti/ Ma di quanti lavor facesti unquanco/ Questo sarà'l piu raro, e piu perfetto.'
[55] See also above, n. 48.

raculous painting became seen as the product of Titian's brush, although up to then it had been regarded as authorless; this, I think, signals an important change in the way the artist's agency was perceived. The portrait of Irene di Spilimbergo came into being around 1560, at the same moment when Titian came to be regarded as the author of the *Christ Carrying the Cross*. I would like to argue that very similar mechanisms have been at work in the case of Irene's portrait, and will even go further this time, by showing that the artist as the author of a painting, as one of the essential agents connected to the work of art, became one of the very themes around which the discourse on Irene di Spilimbergo after her death developed.

This is not to say that we should not proceed with caution when ascribing the portrait (partially) to Titian. For what do we actually mean to say by claiming it has been finished or retouched by Titian? Or rather: what would sixteenth-century authors have meant when they wrote that a painting was finished by Titian? For one, we have to take into consideration the possibility that it was actually one of his assistants who took care of the painting, and not the master himself.[56] Although we nowadays attach great value to the autograph, to the idea that the leader and genius of the workshop has produced a work with his own hands, we should not close our eyes to the possibility that this may have been less relevant to sixteenth-century viewers, and that for them other characteristics may have been of importance in deciding whether a painting was by Titian or not.[57] Writings on painting of the time are of help here. Authors such as Lodovico Dolce, one of Venice's most prominent art

[56] The activities and nature of Titian's *bottega* have long been in the dark, also as a result of purposeful attempts of the artist himself and his mythographers to present the products of the shop as the achievement of a single mind: see above, Chapter One. For the make-up and character of Titian's workshop, see Giorgio Tagliaferro, 'In Tizians Werkstatt, 1548-1576', in: Sylvia Ferino-Pagden (ed.), *Der späte Tizian und die Sinnlichkeit der Malerei*, Vienna 2007, pp. 68-75, and other recent publications by the same author; most important, however, is Tagliaferro and Aikema, *Le botteghe di Tiziano*. Tagliaferro explicitly connects the growth of the workshop after the artist's journey to Augsburg in the late 1540s to the rising demand for high quality replicas of successful prototypes, which he considers a characteristic development for a court culture (see 'In Tizians Werkstatt').

[57] For ideas on the autograph, authenticity, and sixteenth-century connoisseurship in general, see Jeffrey M. Muller, 'Measures of Authenticity, the Detection of Copies in Early Literature on Connoisseurship', in: Kathleen Preciado (ed.), *Retaining the Original: Multiple Originals, Copies, and Reproductions: Proceedings of the Symposium, Baltimore, 8-9 March 1985*, Washington 1989, pp. 141-145; Carol Gibson-Wood, *Studies in the Theory of Connoisseurship from Vasari to Morelli*, New York 1988, pp. 11-13 (on Marcantonio Michiel) and pp.14-32 (on Vasari).

critics of his time, consider the depiction of flesh as one of the major achievements of Titian's brush.[58] Dolce praises the master's altarpiece for S. Niccolò dei Tolentini, Venice, with the following words: 'When Pordenone went to see the afore-mentioned Saint Sebastian, he said, I think that Titian has used flesh in that nude, not colours.'[59] And more generally he writes about Titian's art: 'he is on a par with Nature, for every one of his figures is alive, moves, and its flesh vibrates.'[60] And in one of Pietro Aretino's well-known letters, we may read how Aretino lauds the representation of the naked skin in Titian's Young Saint John the Baptist: 'behold the flesh so well coloured, that in its freshness it looks like snow mixed with vermilion, moved by a pulse and warmed by the spirits of life.'[61] Titian's marvellous depiction of landscape is a favourite topic of Aretino as well; we need only think of the letter in which he compares his actual view on the Canal Grande to his friend's colours on canvas.[62] The more a painting in Titian's vicinity possesses qualities that were so overtly praised by his contemporaries, the more it becomes likely that it was actually regarded as by him. It is even better, of course, when writers actually and explicitly say so. We are therefore lucky to have a passage in Vasari's description of Titian's works that reads as follows:

> Also portrayed from life by Titian were a Venetian *cittadino*, a great friend of his, named Sinistri, and another one, named *messer* Paolo da Ponte, of whom he also portrayed a daughter that he had, a most beautiful young woman,

[58] For Titian's representation of flesh see Daniela Bohde, *Haut, Fleisch und Farbe. Körperlichkeit und Materialität in den Gemälden Tizians*, Emsdetten and Berlin 2002; David Rosand, 'Titian's Saint Sebastians', *Artibus et historiae* 15 (1994), pp. 23-39; Norman E. Land, '"Ekphrasis" and Imagination: Some Observations on Pietro Aretino's Art Criticism', *The Art Bulletin* 68 (1986), pp. 207-217; and also Sophie Couëtoux, 'Les charmes de la chair peinte: Florence, XVIIe siècle', *Studiolo* 5 (2007), pp. 173-192, here p. 174.

[59] 'Ilqual San Sebastiano essendo il Pordenone andato a vedere, hebbe a dire, io stimo, che Titiano in quel nudo habbia posto carne, e non colori.' Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura*, pp. 188-190.

[60] 'Egli [Titian] camina di pari con la Nattura: onde ogni sua figura è viva, si muove, è [*sic*] le carni tremano.' Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura*, pp. 184-185.

[61] 'Guardate le carni sí ben colorite che, ne la freschezza loro, somigliano neve sparsa di vermiglio, mossa da i polsi e riscaldata da gli spiriti de la vita.' Letter from Pietro Aretino to Massimiano Stampa from Venice, 8 October 1531, Aretino, *Lettere*, vol. I, no. 28, p. 82.

[62] Letter from Pietro Aretino to Tiziano Vecellio from Venice, May 1544, published in *Lettere*, vol. III, no. 55, pp. 78-80; for a critical reading see Werner Busch, 'Aretinos Evokation von Tizians Kunst', *Zeitschrift fur Kunstgeschichte* 62 (1999), pp. 91-105.

called *signora* Giulia da Ponte, *comare* of this Titian, and similarly *signora* Irene, a most beautiful virgin, woman of letters, music, and well-informed about *disegno*, who, dying about seven years ago, was celebrated by almost all the pens of the writers of Italy.[63]

Vasari, who wrote this passage probably after his visit to Venice in 1566, presents the portrait of Irene as a work of the master from Cadore. Zuan Paolo Pace has disappeared from the stage.[64]

In the years after Irene's death, her image underwent a thorough metamorphosis. I am using the ambiguous word 'image' on purpose here, for I believe the change not only concerns her physical portrait as painted by Pace and Titian, but also the myth developing around her. This myth tells that, while Zuan Paolo Pace had made a rather dead portrait of a living woman, Titian managed to portray a dead woman as if she had never been more alive.[65]

Such ideas came not out of thin air. No other painter in sixteenth-century Venice, perhaps even in the whole of the Italian peninsula, was praised so widely for the life-giving powers of his brush. Andrea Calmo, perhaps better known as a comrade of Tintoretto's, recollects 'the hands of *ser* Titian, painter, such a profound, magisterial intellect that, with feigned colours, he makes creatures appear on canvas that lack nothing except that they speak and ask for food in order to live'.[66] While Calmo is certainly one of the more

[63] 'Si veggiono anco ritratti di naturale da Tiziano un cittadino viniziano suo amicissimo, chiamato il Sinistri, et un altro nominato messer Paulo da Ponte, del quale ritrasse anco una figliuola che allora aveva, bellissima giovane, chiamata la signora Giulia da Ponte, comare di esso Tiziano, e similmente la signora Irene, vergine bellissima, letterata, musica et incaminata nel disegno, la quale, morendo circa sette anni sono, fu celebrata quasi da tutte le penne degli scrittori d'Italia.' Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. VI, p. 168.

[64] It is interesting in this context that Pace's *Portrait of Giovanni delle Bande Nere* was ascribed to Titian as well, as early as 1585 (see 'Pace, Gian Paolo' in Thieme-Becker, vol. XXVI, p. 117). The portrait was a gift to Giovanni's son, the later grand duke Cosimo I de' Medici, and is now in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. See Karla Langedijk, *The Portraits of the Medici: 15th - 18th Centuries*, Florence 1981, cat. no. 56,6, p. 1028.

[65] It was not uncommon in the Cinquecento to dismiss dull, stiff or old-fashioned paintings as 'dead': see Locovico Dolce on the works of an earlier generation of Venetian painters, as quoted above, Chapter Two: 'le cose morte e fredde di Giovanni Bellino, di Gentile, e del Vivarino [...] lequali erano senza movimento, e senza rilevo...' Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura*, pp. 186-188.

[66] '… le man de ser Titian depentor, tanto profondao intel magisterio del far parer suso una tela con colori fenti le creature, che no ghe manca si no che le parla e domanda da manzar per

original critics, remarks of similar import in Venetian literature attesting of the liveliness of Titian's figures are countless.

There are also more specific passages, however, that go into the powers of the brush as an instrument of life, which produces paintings as the male genitals produce children. In his burlesque poem 'Del pennello', which not only means 'On the paintbrush', but also has a sexual connotation, Agnolo Bronzino describes an image of a couple making love, while smartly confounding his account of the creation of the image with its erotic contents. Arguing for variety, he claims that 'it is enough that in order to make it from behind, in front, across, foreshortened, or in perspective one uses the paintbrush for them all.'[67] And in Pietro Aretino's satiric dialogues on the sex lives of nuns, married women and courtesans, the *Sei Giornate* ('Six Days'), one finds, among many other witty metaphors for the male and female genitals, a paintbrush that is being dipped in the colour cup.[68] Brushes and colour together make for beautiful paintings, so much is certain.

The metaphor is taken to another level by the poet Luigi Groto (1541-1585), also known as the 'Blind one from Adria' ('il Cieco d'Adria'), a great admirer of Tintoretto, who addressed to the painter the following poem:

> So true are the images you paint
> that they seem to be formed by nature,
> and not feigned by way of art.
> So beautiful, and complete are your daughters
> that they seem not naturally conceived
> but painted by a learned brush.

viver…' Letter from Andrea Calmo to *M. Moscardina d'I Gazanti*, Andrea Calmo, *Le lettere di messer Andrea Calmo*, ed. Vittorio Rossi, Turin 1888, pp. 126-127.

[67] Quoted after Fredrika H. Jacobs, 'Aretino and Michelangelo, Dolce and Titian: Femmina, Masculo, Grazia', *The Art Bulletin* 82 (2000), pp. 51-67, here p. 53. The translation is hers.

[68] Jacobs, 'Aretino and Michelangelo, Dolce and Titian', p. 54; see Pietro Aretino, *Sei giornate: ragionamento della Nanna e della Antonia (1534): dialogo nel quale la Nanna insegna a la Pippa (1536)*, ed. Giovanni Aquilecchia, Bari 1969, p. 20. For more examples of the brush as penis and on gendered art criticism in general, see Philip L. Sohm, 'Gendered Style in Italian Art Criticism from Michelangelo to Malvasia', *Renaissance Quarterly* 48 (1995), pp. 759-808.

In order that you produce and feign this well,
without resting you conceive, and paint.[69]

Although the poem starts with a very familiar topos, namely that the painter's works seems to be a product of nature, it takes an interesting turn in the second sentence (verse four) when the topos is reversed and what in reality is the work of nature, now seems a product of art. The last lines can be read as a pun on Tintoretto's characteristic *prestezza*, or quick production.[70] There is more going on, however: juxtaposing the creation of paintings with the conception of daughters, Groto makes clear these two activities share a common ground. By a most suggestive chiasmus, he makes the reader feel that the daughters are paintings – in the sense of ideal women – and the paintings are the actual living beings: they are the ones invested with the painter's powers of life. In the end, they are more alive than life itself.

But what was it, then, that gave the painter's brush these unexpected powers? As Bernardino Tomitano (1517-1576), who shared a great many friends with Titian, and probably also knew the painter himself, argued, it is the finishing touch that matters most:

> … that virtue that gives that same prettiness to beautiful compositions, like the ultimate touches of Michelangelo's chisel give to figures formed by other sculptors, not yet alive and breathing; or, likewise, the ultimate brush strokes of Titian, which in the figures of other painters bring about breath and pulse.[71]

[69] 'Si proprie son le imagini, che fai/ Che da natura sembrano formate/ Non per via d'arte finte./ Si belle, e intere son le figlie, c'hai/ Che non naturalmente generate/ Ma da un dotto pennel paion dipinte./ Pero poi che si ben produci, e fingi/ Senza mai riposar genera, e pingi.' Luigi Groto, *Delle rime … Nuovamente ristampate, et ricorrette …* (Venice, 1587), p. 171. The poem is accompanied by the following comment: 'L'Autor mandò questi versi al Tintoretto singolar pittore in Vinegia, e padre di figlie bellissime, e dotate insieme d'ogni nobil virtù.'

[70] On Tintoretto's *prestezza*, see Una Roman D'Elia, 'Tintoretto, Aretino, and the Speed of Creation', *Word & Image* 20 (2004), pp. 206-218, and Tomas Nichols, 'Tintoretto, Prestezza and the Poligrafi: A Study in Literary and Visual Culture of Cinquecento Venice', *Renaissance Studies* 10 (1996), pp. 72-100.

[71] 'Sopra tutto sia di bella e pura e leggiadra elocutione, laquale è quella virtù, che rende quella istessa vaghezza a i belli componimenti, quale rendono l'ultime impressioni dello scarpello di Michel'agnolo alle figure non be vive e spiranti formate da gli altri scultori: ò gli ultimi tratti di Titiano, che alle figure de gli altri pittori recano la lena e'l polso.' Bernardino Tomitano,

If Tomitano had specifically wanted to refer to the portrait of Irene, made by another painter but enlivened by the touch of Titian's brush, he could not have said it better.

Agency in the Art of Painting

In his *Della historia diece dialoghi* (*Ten Dialogues on History*) Francesco Patrizi (1529-1597), a leading philosopher and member of the Accademia della Fama, made a distinction between human action and superterrestial action. Here as well as below, I will mainly let men connected to this Academy speak, for, as will become clear, the memorial volume for Irene di Spilimbergo is strongly connected to that institution, too. While, in Patrizi's view, human action is bound by time and space, superterrestial action is free from such conditions. And while human actors need *instruments* to do things – the philosopher comes up with the example of the hammer – the gods can do without.[72] Applied to the art of painting, in particular to the portrait of Irene di Spilimbergo, it is clear that, in the eyes of sixteenth-century Venetians, this is derived from the former category: it is the product of human action, the action of the great Titian.[73] No longer are the origins of the image wrapped in mystery, or traced back to the interference of a divine being: this portrait is generally considered to be the product of the agency of a human being,

Ragionamenti della lingua … I precetti della rhetorica secondo l'artificio d'Aristotele e Cicerone nel fine del secondo libro nuovamente aggionti (Venice, 1546), pp. 298-299.

[72] 'Ogni attione, o publica, o privata ch'ella sia, o di pace, o di guerra, o di popolar sollevamento, è necessario che ella sia fatta da qualche persona: laquale sia l'attore di quell'attione: e senza ilquale non possa ella farsi à patto niuno. Et l'attore sempre si muove ad operar la sua attione, per qualche cagione. Et l'attione humana essendo movimento, e ogni movimento fece[n]dosi in tempo, conviene sempre che l'attore, faccia l'attion sua in tempo; e sia ella dal tempo sempre misurata. Et anchora percioche l'attore è corpo, e si muove per far l'attione, egli è necessario, che ella sia faccia in luogo. […] Et avvegnadio, che gli attori sopracelesti operin le loro operationi, si come fuor di luogo, et sopra al tempo, così senza stromento alcuno.' Francesco Patrizi, *Della historia diece dialoghi … ne' quali si ragiona di tutte le cose appartenenti all'historia, et allo scriverla, et all'osservarla* (Venice, 1561), p. 38r. Patrizi's treatise has been reprinted in Eckhard Kessler (ed.), *Theoretiker humanistischer Geschichtsschreibung: Nachdruck exemplarischer Texte aus dem 16. Jahrhundert*, Munich 1971.

[73] As an historian, Patrizi himself was interested in the art of painting, both as source material and as a medium in which to present one's findings: 'Non solamente adunque, […] l'historia si scrive, ma et si scolpisce ella, et si dipinge…' Patrizi, *Della historia diece dialoghi*, p. 14r. On Patrizi's antiquarian interests, see Anthony Grafton, *What was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 2007, pp. 130-134.

Tiziano Vecellio, working at a particular place, Venice, in the years around 1560, a particular moment in human, historical time.

The figure of the artist as the principal agent behind a painting was receiving a lot of attention in mid-century Venice. There is a wealth of written sources discussing the phenomenon and related questions, such as: 'Should the subject depicted or the way in which the painter has chosen to depict it be the decisive factor in our judgment of the work?' and 'What aspect of a painting, e.g. its material or maker, should we mention first when we praise a work?'[74] Let us look at a few fragments. In his *Ragionamento della poesia* (1562), Bernardo Tasso (1493-1569), father of the better known Torquato Tasso, in an apology for the art of poetry rhetorically asks whether the whole of poetry should be held responsible if a few poets write lascivious and inappropriate verses.[75] He illustrates his point of view with the following, hypothetical, example:

> Tell us, please, most benevolent listeners: if Titian, the famous painter, … had painted [*pingesse*] a lascivious satyr who, from under a shadow or lying on a green meadow, violated a humble maiden, or, in a leafy forest in the falling shadow of the highest trees the obscene intercourse of Venus and Adonis, would you reprimand the beautiful and astonishing art of painting or the lascivious invention of the painter?[76]

In fact, we do not know of works by Titian that conform to Tasso's descriptions; nor is it very likely that the theorist would really have wanted to criticize the painter. For Tasso, member of the Accademia della Fama and

[74] Other relevant remarks on the topic, which I will not discuss here, have been written by Giulio Camillo Delminio: see his 'Scoltura o pittura lodata' in Giulio Camillo Delminio, *Le idee, overo forme della oratione da Hermogene considerate, et ridotte in questa lingua* (Udine, 1594), p. 72v.

[75] 'Né questo è difetto della poesia ma del poeta, il quale a guisa di malvagio medico dà il veleno in vece della medecina, e dove la vergina mente de' garzonetti d'ottimi costumi adornar dovrebbe, coi vizii la corrompe.' Bernardo Tasso, *Ragionamento della poesia*, ed. Bernard Weinberg, *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento*, vol. II, Bari 1970, p. 577.

[76] 'Diteci per grazia, benignissimi auditori, se Tiziano famosissimo pittore, l'opere del cui pennello in alcuna parte non cedono et in molte avanzano quelle degli antiqui, pingesse un lascivo satiro sotto qualche ombra o nel letto di qualche verdeggiante prato una umile verginella violare, o in qualche frondosa selva al rezzo degli altissimi arbori cadente, l'osceno congiugnimento di Venere e d'Adone, riprendereste voi la vaga e maravigliosa pittura o la lasciva invenzione del pittore?' Tasso, *Ragionamento della poesia*, p. 577.

contributor to Irene's memorial volume, Titian was simply the point of reference when painting was concerned.[77] What he conveys here is that it is an individual artist rather than the whole art that is responsible for a given work.

Claudio Tolomei, a man of letters who seems to have been acquainted with the Accademia della Fama's founder, Federico Badoer, is perhaps more articulate.[78] In a letter to Sebastiano del Piombo (c. 1485-1547), a painter who started his career in Venice, Tolomei wrote about a portrait of him that Sebastiano was planning to paint:

> Me, seeing in your art vividly expressed my image, which will be a continuous stimulus for me to purge my soul from its many faults, not only in that respect that led Socrates to ask of young people that they look into the mirror, but also, more to the point, for seeing you in the midst of many luminous rays of your virtues, which will inflame my soul with a beautiful desire for honour and glory.[79]

What Tolomei is saying with these words, filled with praise, is that his portrait painted by Sebastiano will not only make him know himself – as a mirror does – but that it will also show the character of the one who has painted it, the artist. That is, the portrait will lead the viewer to the topic depicted, its prototype, but it also demonstrates the painter's artistry, and moves the spectator's soul to the imitation of the virtues inherent in that artistry.

That Titian himself was aware of the ongoing debate on authorship seems likely (as has also been suggested in Chapter One), not only because he was personally acquainted with many Venetian *letterati* of his time, among whom Bernardo Tasso, but also because he seems to have expressed his view on the matter. A paraphrase of his words has been recorded by a visitor to his work-

[77] See Giancarlo Alfano, *Dioniso e Tiziano: La rappresentazione dei "simili" nel Cinquecento tra decorum e sistema dei generi*, Rome 2001, pp. 221-222.

[78] Tolomei wrote a eulogy of Badoer: Lina Bolzoni, 'Il "Badoaro" di Francesco Patrizi e l'Accademia veneziana della Fama', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 158 (1981), pp. 71-101, here p. 73.

[79] 'Me, vedendo ne l'arte vostra espressa vivamente la mia imagine, la quale mi sarà continuo stimolo a purgare l'anima di molti suoi mancamenti; non solo per quel rispetto, per lo qual Socrate voleva che i gioveni si guardasseno ne lo specchio; ma molto più, perche vedendovi dentro molti luminosi raggi de le vostre virtù, mi s'accenderà l'anima a bel disiderio d'honore, e di gloria.' Letter from Claudio Tolomei to Sebastiano Luciani from Rome, 20 August 1543, published in Claudio Tolomei, *De le lettere … lib. sette. Con una breve dichiarazione in fine di tutto l'ordin de l'ortografia di questa opera* (Venice, 1547), p. 75.

shop.[80] When Francisco de Vargas, ambassador to Charles V, asked the painter why he painted these large stains with these heavy brushes (referring to the master's *pittura di macchia*, characteristic of his late style), Titian answered that he did not want to imitate other celebrated painters and that he rather developed his own manner in order to acquire fame with innovation.[81] Whether Titian really said something like this or not, the anecdote makes sufficiently clear that his circle believed it was not only the prototype that was present in a painting painted by Titian: the painter himself also left his mark, put something of himself in his work, 'proclaimed his presence'.[82]

Paintings as Relics?

In a commentary to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Lodovico Dolce wrote that 'in old times the images of the great Gods (like in our days venerably those of the Saints) were honoured not for the sake of their artists, but for the resemblance of those whom they represented,' thereby suggesting that the importance of the painting's prototype was something of the past.[83] And indeed, so far we have seen much praise for the artist responsible for the portrait of Irene di Spilimbergo, for the mastery of Titian's brush, and hardly any for its prototype, Irene. Nonetheless, a pressing question remains as yet unanswered. If Titian's brush really was the only thing that mattered, why then would Da Ponte not have asked the master to make a new painting altogether, and let him have a free rein? Why then would he instead have insisted on the adaptation of an already existing, minor work?

[80] See especially D'Elia, *The poetics of Titian's religious paintings*, pp. 184-185.

[81] Letter from Antonio Pérez, secretary of state under Philip II: '… respondió el Ticiano: Señor, yo desconfié de llegar á la delicadeza y primor del pincel de Micael Angelo, Urbino, Corregio y Parmesano, y que cuando bien llegase, sería estimado tras ellos, ó tenido por imitador dellos; y la ambicion, natural no ménos á mi arte que á las otras, me hizo echar por caminio nuevo que me hiciese célebre en algo, como los otros lo fuéron por el que siguieron.' Quoted from David Rosand, 'Tintoretto e gli spiriti nel pennello', in: *Jacopo Tintoretto nel quarto centenario della morte: atti del convegno internazionale di studi*, eds. Paola Rossi and Lionello Puppi, Venice 1996, p. 134, n. 15; with additional bibliography.

[82] A formulation of David Rosand (see Rosand, 'Tintoretto e gli spiriti nel pennello', p. 134).

[83] '… le imagini de i gran Dij (come a giorni nostri dignissimamente quelle de' Santi) venivano honorate ne gli antichi tempi non per cagion de gli Artefici loro, ma per la sembianza di coloro, che esse appresentavano.' Lodovico Dolce, *Le trasformationi … di nuovo ristampate e … ricorrette et in diversi luoghi ampliate …* (Venice, 1553), p. iijr.

Above, I already noted that the portrait of Irene di Spilimbergo changed its function with her death. It therefore had to be adjusted to a more ideal image, I would like to argue, that came into being as soon as she passed away. Such a procedure is not uncommon. With Christian saints, for example, comparable things happened. As Hans Belting shows, when the holy Francis of Assisi had died, his 'image' constantly had to undergo changes. New biographies of Francis corrected earlier ones to the extent that the older texts had to be destroyed in order to hide the differences. The same was true for ceremonial images of the saint. Both texts and images had to be convincing, they had to be believed in, and therefore had to be adapted to the desirable perception people were supposed to have of the saint.[84] This same mechanism may have urged Zuan Paolo da Ponte to commission Titian to work on Irene's portrait; for, when time passed and the memory of her real, and only too human person faded, another perhaps more divine, more beautiful image of Irene came into being with which her painted portrait had to keep up. The best way to hide discrepancies was to ask Titian simply to overpaint the earlier image. Although we should not neglect the fact that this was the better solution from an economic point of view, too, we may wonder whether money was Da Ponte's only motive.[85]

For was Pace's portrait, despite all its weaknesses, not already too much cherished to throw it away? In spite of its low quality, there was something about the portrait that would be difficult, if not impossible, to find a substitute for: the portrait was painted from life and, at least partially, in Irene's presence.[86] This added to the painting's truthfulness, and also had the effect

[84] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p. 13.

[85] As he noted in his diary, Da Ponte paid Titian six ducats for his retouches; while for two completely new portraits, commissioned from the same artist in 1534, he was charged 10 and 20 ducats respectively (in which were not included the costs for the *lapis lazuli* necessary for the already most expensive of the two). See *Tiziano ritrovato: il ritratto di messer Zuan Paulo da Ponte*, Venice 1998.

[86] Again, Da Ponte's *Memoriali* are an important source: the reason Titian charged varying amounts for the two 1534 portraits was that he could stay in his workshop for the first, of Da Ponte himself; for the second on the contrary, a depiction of Da Ponte's daughter Giulia, he had to come visit the young lady at home, as befitted women of her class. See Book C, entry of 8 March 1534, cited after *Tiziano ritrovato*. It is likely that the portrait of Irene was produced according to the same painterly practice; that is, that Pace in order to make an outline for the portrait visited the young woman at home.

that something of her presence was literally left in the picture. The painting had a relic-like quality.

In the period itself, images were sometimes defined as relics, too. But not necessarily as relics of the depicted persons. The following words, which Pietro Aretino addressed to Michelangelo, are an eloquent example: 'But why, oh lord, do you not remunerate my enormous devotion, I who bow to your heavenly quality, with a relic of those drawings that to you do not mean that much?'[87] While, according to Aretino, Michelangelo did not value his drawings much, to Aretino they were a relic of Michelangelo's genius. This again brings us to the figure of the artist. Regarding the portrait of Irene di Spilimbergo, it seems safe to conclude that Titian's life-giving touch had invested Irene's portrait with relic-like power. A relic of whom or of what, however, has, for a little while longer, to remain open.

The Poem Collection

We will now leave the paintings behind and move over to poetry; for we have hardly paid any attention yet to the *Rime di diversi nobilissimi, et eccellentissimi autori*, or, in other words, Irene's memorial collection.

Who were responsible for the collection? Let us start with the man known as the principal initiator. One of the most significant people in Irene's circle of noblemen, *letterati* and artists was Giorgio Gradenigo (1522-1600). As the inheritor of some estates in the vicinity of Cividale, just like Spilimbergo located near Udine in the Friuli region, he may have known Irene's family from an early date.[88] We know for certain that he was a close friend of Irene's mother Giulia, as is shown by their correspondence.[89] He was a powerful

[87] 'Ma perché, o signore, non remunerate voi la cotanta divozion di me, che inchino la celeste qualità di voi, con una reliquia di quelle carte che vi son meno care?' Aretino, *Lettere*, vol. III, no. 52, pp. 74-75, here p. 75. See also Julius Held, 'The Early Appreciation of Drawing' in: *Acts of the Twentieth International Congress of the History of Art: New York, September 7 - 12, 1961*, ed. Ida E. Rubin, vol. III, *Latin American Art, and the Baroque Period in Europe*, Princeton 1963, pp. 72-95, here p. 81.

[88] Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 46; for an extensive bibliography see D.B.I., s.v. 'Gradenigo, Giorgio'. On Giorgio Gradenigo and his literary production see also Cicogna, *Delle inscrizioni veneziane*, vol. II, pp. 35-40.

[89] Four letters from Gradenigo to Da Ponte are published in Acquaro Graziosi, *Giorgio Gradenigo* (numbers XIII-XVI). Two from Da Ponte to Gradenigo are in Bartolomeo Zucchi (ed.), *L'Idea del segretario … rappresentata in un trattato dell'imitatione e nelle lettere di principi e d'altri*

man, starting his career as *podestà* of Portogruaro, on the *terraferma* north-east of Venice (1552-1553), and later on became a senator. A lover of poetry both ancient and modern and of music and painting, he was a member of Venice's only official sixteenth-century academy, the *Accademia Veneziana* or *della Fama* (1557-1561).[90] Gradenigo wrote and published poetry, which he exchanged with fellow poets and, according to the modern editor of his work, in his spare time he liked to paint.[91]

The nature of Gradenigo's relationship with Irene di Spilimbergo, sixteen years his junior, is not particularly clear. That he, as a friend of Irene's mother, was quite fond of the young woman seems beyond doubt, but if this was just friendship or whether something more was going on is difficult to say. One of his friends called Irene Gradenigo's 'beloved, and most beloved Milady, or lady, or woman, whatever she is,' and several modern commentators have indeed assumed a romantic relationship between the two.[92] Benedetto Croce, on the other hand, characterized Gradenigo as a man 'who was possibly in that delicate and sweet state of mind between friend and lover'.[93] A number of poems in the memorial collection, specifically addressed to its initiator, and those poems under the heading of '*incerto*', generally ascribed to Gradenigo, also attest of his affection for Irene.[94] Be this all as it may, loving

signori (Venice, 1606); another part of their correspondence is in Bernardino Pino (ed.), *Della nuova scielta di lettere di diversi nobilissimi huomini et eccellentissimi ingegni, scritte in diverse materie, fatta da tutti i libri fin'hora stampati, libro secondo* (Venice, 1582).

[90] On the Accademia della Fama, see Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, pp. 114-122, with further bibliography. Gradenigo was one of the regents of the Academy's *Stanze degli humanisti* (see Cicogna, *Delle inscrizioni veneziane*, vol. II, p. 36, who quotes from the *Istromento di Deputazione* (1560), and also attests of Gradenigo's friendship with Federico Badoer (1519-1593), founder of the Academy).

[91] Acquaro Graziosi, *Giorgio Gradenigo*, pp. 20-21.

[92] '… amata, e amatissima Madonna, o donna, o femina, che ella si sia…' Letter from Lodovico Novello to Francesco degli Oratori, undated, published in Francesco Turchi (ed.), *Delle lettere facete et piacevoli di diversi grandi huomini et chiari ingegni, scritte sopra diverse materie, libro secondo* (Venice, 1575), pp. 349-353, quoted from Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 46.

[93] Croce, 'Irene di Spilimbergo', pp. 365-366. That the two were engaged to be married is concluded by Zotti, *Irene di Spilimbergo*, p. 30.

[94] Cicogna, *Delle inscrizioni veneziane*, vol. II, p. 37; Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', pp. 46-47. Interesting in this regard is also the following passage from Lodovico Dolce's 1568 edition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: 'V'è Giorgio Gradinico, a cui le rime/ vegg'ir seconde l'altrui lodi prime./ Questi il vago, leggiadro e puro canto,/ che fermar l'onde a l'armonia poteo,/ vòlto soavemente al nuovo pianto/ dolce non men che quel del tracio Orfeo,/ chiamando Irene che nel suo bel manto/ stupir già l'arte e la natura feo,/ e per suoi tanti pregi in

Irene did not refrain him from loving her mother with equal passion, as is suggested for example by a letter to her in which he begs her to move from Spilimbergo to Venice, that city in which 'live so many of your kin, so many of your friends, who wait for you, who call for you, who breathe the desire to see you and be with you'.[95] Although Gradenigo is not officially connected to the memorial volume, his name is mentioned in the Latin dedication, which shows that he is the real motor behind the volume.[96] The several poems of condolence addressed to Gradenigo in the volume further underline this.[97] Based on our knowledge of his friendship with Giulia da Ponte, we may hypothesize that he closely cooperated with her and her father and the rest of the Spilimbergo clan, with which Giulia stayed connected through her second marriage.[98]

As far as the practical execution of the volume is concerned, it was published with Domenico and Giovanni Battista Guerra, two brothers originally from the Friuli – not coincidentally the same region as Gradenigo's and Irene's – who established themselves in Venice probably only one year before the volume was published.[99] The editor of the volume was Dionigi Atanagi, who was a poet and joined several literary academies in Rome before editing his first collection *De le lettere di tredici huomini illustri* ('Letters of thirteen illustrious men'; 1554). When he moved to Venice in 1559, he soon found a

ciel felice,/ splende più assai, che la gran Laura e Bice…' Lodovico Dolce, *Le trasformationi … tratte da Ovidio* (Venice, 1568), p. 20v.

[95] '… nella quale vivono tanti vostri parenti, tanti vostri amici, che v'aspettano, che vi chiamano, che sospirano nel desiderio di vedervi e d'esser con voi'. Acquaro Graziosi, *Giorgio Gradenigo*, letter XVI.

[96] 'Ea fuit IRENES Spilimbergiae virtus; ea est Georgii Gradonici gratia, et auctoritas apud omnes, qui aliquo ingenii lumine hodie in Italia clarent…' *Diversorum praestantium poetarum carmina in obitu Irenes Spilimbergiae*. See Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 46 and further; D.B.I., vol. 58, pp. 304-306, s.v. 'Gradenigo, Giorgio'.

[97] Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 47; Francesco Turchi (ed.), *Delle lettere facete et piacevoli di diversi grandi huomini et chiari ingegni, scritte sopra diverse materie, libro secondo* (Venice, 1575), pp. 349-353.

[98] For the second marriage, see Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 44. For the family's connection to the poem collection, see also Corsaro, 'Dionigi Atanagi e la silloge per Irene di Spilimbergo', p. 47.

[99] Fernanda Ascarelli and Marco Menato, *La tipografia del '500 in Italia*, Florence 1989, s.v. 'Guerra Domenico e Giovanni Battista'. The Guerra brothers were active from 1560 to 1600, so Irene's volume, published in 1561, must have been one of their first Venetian commissions. For their bibliography, see Ester Pastorello, *Tipografi, editori, librai a Venezia nel secolo XVI*, Florence 1924, no. 235.

job as secretary to the Accademia della Fama, which is most likely where he met Gradenigo. That it was not Atanagi's own initiative is clear: not a nobleman, he was a mere executive, and, belonging to a lower social class than Irene, he will hardly have known her.

Finally, there are of course the poets that contributed; no less than 143 have attached their names to the project.[100] Among them are such well-known figures as Benedetto Varchi, Francesco Patrizi, and the young Torquato Tasso, but also many lesser known *letterati*. Part of them can be connected directly to Gradenigo, but others will have been contacted indirectly; I also suspect that Atanagi's network in Rome has been of much help. What is more, it has been argued that Gradenigo and Atanagi were not the only ones to invite poets to contribute; a number of poems literally contains requests from one poet to another to participate, or a response to such a request. These poems thus suggest an expanding movement engaging ever more poets, in the end encompassing the whole Italian peninsula.[101]

Although it is related to several literary genres of the time, the volume for Irene was unique at the moment of its publication. To be sure, it would not have come into being in this form without the huge popularity of (exemplary) women in sixteenth-century literature; and also in terms of funerary poetry the volume has a number of important precedents.[102] Yet, never had a recently deceased woman been honoured on such a scale; and never had the genre of the poem collection been combined with biography. So why this

[100] For a list of all contributors, see Schutte, 'Commemorators of Irene di Spilimbergo'.
[101] Favretti, 'Una raccolta di rime del cinquecento', p. 553.
[102] For the volume's literary context, see Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', pp. 47-49. As to precursors in the funerary genre, one may think of the rather obscure collection for Livia Colonna (see Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 48) or the volume for the poet Serafino Aquilano (d. 1500). However, most important perhaps, certainly in the Venetian context, was the collection of poems written in memory of Valerio Marcello, son of the patrician Jacopo Antonio Marcello, who died, still a child, in 1460. See Margaret L. King, 'The Death of the Child Valerio Marcello: Paternal Mourning in Renaissance Venice', in: Maryanne Cline Horowitz, Anne J. Cruz, and Wendy A. Furman (eds.), *Renaissance Rereadings: Intertext and Context*, Urbana and Chicago 1988, pp. 205-224. See also Corsaro, 'Dionigi Atanagi e la silloge per Irene di Spilimbergo', p. 43, and Armando Petrucci, *Writing the Dead: Death and Writing Strategies in the Western Tradition*, translated by Michael Sullivan, Stanford 1998, pp. 81-84. Carlo Dionisotti considered the Aquilano-collection as an important moment in the unification of Italian poetry (Carlo Dionisotti, 'Niccolò Liburnio e la letteratura cortigiana', *Lettere Italiane* 14 (1962), pp. 33-58, here p. 49); in that sense it makes an interesting comparison with Irene's volume, too.

remarkable initiative? Clearly, not all participants had heard of Irene di Spilimbergo before they were approached. Perhaps surprisingly, this is not only true for some of the more reputed poets in the volume, but also for a number of less talented figures. In fact, it seems that literary quality was not the initiators' main objective. This is at least suggested by Dionigi Atanagi in a letter to Bernardino Pino, in which he expresses his disappointment about the result:

> They are rhymes and Latin verses; if you happen to find among them less perfect things, you should not be surprised, for one could not have it done otherwise; the gentlemen who had it printed wanted it this way, partly to expand the book, partly not to offend those authors from whom they had asked compositions.[103]

Antonio Corsaro, pointing to the illustrious rank of some other people celebrated in poem collections vis-à-vis the, what he calls, 'peripheral' character of Irene, proposes that the volume is an attempt of members of the in 1561 suppressed Accademia della Fama to continue their activities, albeit in a less risky, conspicuous way.[104] Although more evidence would be necessary to fully prove this point – at what moment were the first initiatives taken, for example, and how does this relate to the fall of the academy? – it is certain that many of the academy's former members were involved in the volume. Whether it was consciously intended or not, the project resulted in a poem collection by 'Accademia della Fama & Friends', and is still known today mainly because it provides such a fine and complete overview of tendencies in Italian lyric of the time.[105] Another intended or unintended effect was that Irene's name was dispersed all over the peninsula, and not only hers – it is significant that the volume's title not only mentions Irene but also the other women of her family: 'In morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilim-

[103] 'Sono rime et versi latini; se tra loro troverete de le cose per avventura meno perfette, non ve ne maraviglierete, perciochè non s'è potuto fare altrimenti, havendo così voluto i gentilhuomini che gli hanno fatto stampare, parte per crescere il libro, parte per non fare ingiuria agli autori, che richiesti l'hanno composto.' Letter from Dionigi Atanagi to Bernardino Pino, 13 September 1561, quoted after Corsaro, 'Dionigi Atanagi e la silloge per Irene di Spilimbergo', p. 45.
[104] Corsaro, 'Dionigi Atanagi e la silloge per Irene di Spilimbergo', p. 46.
[105] See Favretti, 'Una raccolta di rime del cinquecento', pp. 548 and 550.

bergo', '… Lady Irene of the Ladies of Spilimbergo'.[106] The memorial collection has therefore not only extended and enhanced the Italian republic of letters, but also connected the Spilimbergo family name with it.

In what follows, I will discuss parts of the volume in more detail, focusing particularly on the ways in which the volume constructs an image of Irene.

The Volume as Portrait

Before I come to the portrait-like character of the memorial volume in its totality, I would like to pay some attention to Irene's biography, which contains an actual description of her features.[107] In fact, the biography ends with it, after the record of her death which has already been discussed above. The complete passage reads as follows:

> Besides these many excellent beauties of the spirit, referred to above, also her body was beautiful. And she was so amiable and gracious in her face, and in all the movements of her person, that it was almost impossible that a man would meet her in the street and not stop to look at her, praising to himself the beauty and the graces that appeared in her in every part. She was of mediocre stature, but, as far as the parts are concerned that show themselves to the eye, very well formed all over her body. She had a well measured face, full of a certain loveliness, and of blood so sweet and benign that she was most pleasant to look at. Her eyes, furthermore, the most noble part, and the most beautiful of her body – their magnitude, their colour, their liveliness, their sweetness of spirits, the way they were placed in their sockets, and also the shadows proceeding from the length of their lids, formed and placed so well – from them came a wonderful feeling of joy. As if they were burning she would send a couple of loving beams right into the heart of onlookers, moved their blood, and made them willing to receive and keep the image of her face for a long time. Often it was said that she had wizard's eyes [*occhi*

[106] Atanagi, *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*, titlepage. The extra 'Delle Signore di Spilimbergo' was also added to Giulia da Ponte's name, Irene's mother, in Francesco Sansovino's *Venetia Città Nobilissima* (see above, n. 19). This addition to the name was probably meant to lay emphasis on the inheritance of the title.

[107] Although the collection as a whole was published only once, the biography has been republished in an anthology of orations in the vernacular, compiled by Francesco Sansovino: *Delle orationi volgarmente scritte da diuersi huomini illustri de tempi nostri* (Venice: Altobello Salicato, 1584), pp. 107r-110v. See Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 45.

maghi]. That force of her eyes was very well-known to herself; for almost always she kept them wide open and accompanied them with a certain sweet smile, coming from a most beautiful mouth. She controlled them with a majesty both honest and pleasant, and taking the liberty to bend them towards anyone, with the behaviour of a grave person, and with an honest disposition, so that in one and the same moment [people] would get to know her as a most beautiful, graceful, and at the same time honest girl, and, because of her singular qualities, worthy of being the wife of a prince.[108]

At first, the biographer uses quite general terms to describe Irene and praise her beauties: men could not but look round at her in the streets, she had a shapely body and a well-proportioned face. But then he turns to one specific part of her body, her eyes; their praise takes up the lion's share. We do not learn how long her neck was, how her candid skin alternated with the rose blushes on her cheeks, how her hair shimmered like gold and her teeth were like pearls – in short, all those highly appreciated female qualities that we would not only expect on the basis of our knowledge of the ideals of female beauty current at the time, but also because of her painted portrait discussed above.[109] No, all we hear about are her eyes.[110] According to the biographer,

[108] 'Oltre a tante, e cosi egregie bellezze d'animo di sopra accennate; era anco bella di corpo: e tanto amabile, e gratiosa nel volto, e in tutti i movimenti della persona, che era quasi impossibile, c'huomo l'incontrasse per istrada, e non si fermasse a contemplarla, lodando tra se la beltà e le gratie, che da ogni parte apparivano in lei. Era di statura mediocre, ma per quello, che mostravano le parti soggette all'occhio, formatissima di tutto il corpo. Haveva il volto ben misurato, pieno d'una certa venustà, e d'un sangue così dolce, e benigno, che era soavissimo a contemplare. Gli occhi poi, parte più nobile, e più bella del corpo suo, erano per grandezza, per colore, per vivacità, per dolcezza di spiriti, per incassamento, e così per ombra procedente dalla lunghezza della palpebre, tanto ben elementari, e posti, che da loro scendeva maraviglioso diletto. Da quali mandando quasi da accesa face alcuni raggi amorosi ne' cuori de riguardanti, moveva loro il sangue, e gli rendeva disposti a ricevere, e conservar per lungo tempo l'imagine del volto suo. Onde spesso l'era detto, che ella havea gli occhi maghi. Questa forza de gli occhi suoi era molto ben conosciuta da lei, perché quasi sempre li teneva ben aperti, e accompagnandoli con certo suo dolce riso, procedente da bellissima bocca, li reggeva con maestà insieme honesta, e soave, usando la libertà del volgerli verso ciascuno. Con portamento della persona grave e con l'habito honesto, che ad un tempo istesso la facevano conoscere per donzella bellissima, gratiosissima, honestissima. E per le sue singolari qualità degna d'esser moglie di Principe.'

[109] See the studies by Cropper as in n. 38.

[110] Some commentators have already pointed to the neoplatonic character of the eyes' description, and especially of their designation as *maghi*, 'wizard-like' or 'magical'. Corsaro, 'Dionigi Atanagi e la silloge per Irene di Spilimbergo', p. 47; Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 55.

these eyes are the most noble and beautiful element of Irene's body. It is the way they look, but also the way Irene looks with them – that is, she perfectly knows how to use them to maximum effect; she pierces the hearts of the people around her. Such observations should be understood in connection with sixteenth-century ideas of vision and the working of the eyes.[111] For early modern Italians the eye arguably was the most important of the five senses. As Stuart Clark explains, a particularly rich source of thought regarding the eyes was poetry, especially Petrarchan and Neo-Platonic love poetry. The idea that love caught the lover through the eyes was an old theme. The eye was both the cause and the curse of love; besides being a 'gate to the soul and a choice object of worship' it was also dangerous, possessing the lover and never letting go.[112]

But besides the relation with love, the eye also has an unmistakable connection with agency in general. The opened, shining eye was the organ reserved exclusively to those capable of acting. Already in antiquity the eyes had this special function. In ancient literature and mythology, gods were recognized by their shining, sparkling eyes, and there often was an intimate connection between their visual faculty and their powers – when a god was (temporarily) blinded, he was unable to exercise his might.[113] The same was true of the gods' images, whose eyes were believed to follow people within their field of vision, or even damage them, blind or paralyze them in case of eye contact. Irene's friends will certainly have been familiar with stories like these, for they appear in many classical writings, among others with popular authors like Homer and Pliny.[114] And in case these stories of the antique eye had not managed to reach them, they were certainly aware of the importance of the eyes in their own Christian cult images – as we have seen in Chapter One – in which the painting in of the eyes is, as David Freedberg puts it, 'the

[111] For early modern theories of vision, see Stuart Clark, *Vanities of the Eye: Vision in Early Modern European Culture*, Oxford and New York 2007.
[112] Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, pp. 22-23.
[113] Deborah Steiner, *Images in Mind: Statues in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature and Thought*, Princeton 2001, p. 167 and further.
[114] See, for example, accounts of recognitions in Homer's *Iliad*, I.200 and III.397; or a passage in Pliny's *Natural History* 36.16 for an image of Artemis that looked severe when a person entered her domain and glad when she was left alone again; see also the story of several cult statues that blind the viewers less they turn their gaze away (Pliny, *Natural History* 36.32). For these and many other examples see Steiner, *Images in Mind*, p. 172 and further.

last stage of making an image, and the first stage of making it operative'.[115] The relation between eyes and animation, both in images and actual human beings, was a very widespread idea.[116]

The description of Irene's appearance which concludes her biography can thus be read on several levels. First, as the biographer himself signals, it complements our picture of her, heretofore largely consisting of her character or interior, with information about her outward features. Secondly, it tries to explain one of the reasons of her power over people, and thus, one of the *raisons d'être* of the memorial volume itself. But thirdly, we would wrong this passage if we would interpret it as a mere description; on the contrary, it should be regarded as a portrait in its own right. Giving this much attention to Irene's eyes, the readers almost see them in front of them, and thereby Irene becomes present in her own book. With these lines on the eyes the poem collection is given a face.

'La mia vera effigie'[117]

That not only the description discussed above, but also a collection of poems can be considered as a sort of portrait, is an idea that was not at all uncommon in Irene's environment. Contributors to the volume allude to it, like Lodovico Dolce: 'So make with pen and ink a living portrait on such worthy paper…'[118] And in the seventeenth century Giovanni Baglione would write about Irene that '[Huomini] Virtuosi sang of her death on paper with a speaking art of painting.'[119] On the following pages I will give an overview of ideas about the literary portrait; ideas that were circulating among Irene's friends.

[115] Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, p. 51.

[116] Freedberg provides examples throughout his book. See also Gell, *Art and Agency*, chapter 7.7.

[117] See verse 7 of Celio Magno's sonnet 'Non de la spoglia mia terrena, e frale', as written down in the autograph manuscript B.N.M. It. IX. 171 (= 6092), *Rime di Celio Magno*, c. 4.

[118] 'Fate adunque con penna, e con inchiostro/ Vivo ritratto in cosi degne carte…' Lodovico Dolce in a sonnet responding to Giovan Maria Verdizotti, from Atanagi, *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*, p. 84. For Verdizotti, see below, n. 134.

[119] 'E sin nell'ultimo nostro secolo leggiamo d'Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo di questi artificii sì studiosa, che nella sua maniera giunse ad imitare l'eccellenza del Titiano, e la sua morte da' Virtuosi in carte con loquace pittura fu cantata.' Giovanni Baglione, *Le vite de' pittori scultori et architetti dal pontificato di Gregorio 13. del 1572 in fino a' tempi di papa Urbano Ottavo nel 1642* (Rome, 1642), p. 92.

The idea that words, just like real images, should appeal to the senses was old and widespread.[120] This is what Giulio Camillo points to when he claims that no poem that does not bring forth colours like in flowers, or agreeable sounds, sweet odours, pleasant flavours or tangible softness, will be listened to with attention.[121] Poetry should appeal to the senses; it is paramount that it produces images, and brings the people and things it is about, vividly before the eyes. This is an important step towards the idea that words can portray just like images.

As to portraiture, some writers claim that poetry, or text in general, is in fact much better suited to it than painting, or sculpture, for that matter. Thus, Paolo Manuzio (1512-1574), humanist and son of the famous Aldo Manuzio, and, what is more, typographer of the Accademia della Fama, writes in a letter to Pietro Aretino:

> Do not boast about Titian, having portrayed you in a divine, heretofore unknown manner with colours from life; or about Sansovino, or Danese, who know how to sculpt you with their artistic hand in a living form: for of the two images of yours, the less beautiful is that of your body. For many years, the art of painting may preserve it, and sculpture even for ages, but, in the end, conquered by the force of time like all other things, it will have spoilt, and be consumed. Your real image, the most perfect one, and with even more resplendent beauty, is that of your soul; and that will last forever. For you yourself paint it, and you yourself sculpt it, and every day it gets better with new works, all portraits of the own invention of your mind, all wonderful; you represent, thus liberating yourself from the cruel tyranny of voracious time.[122]

[120] The rhetorical concept of 'enargeia' is important here. See above, Introduction.

[121] '… nessuna compositione poetica serà mai con attentione ascoltata, se non porgerà piacere ad alcuno de' sensi, mettendoli davanti ò colori, come ne' fiori, nell'herbe, ò il altri vaghi corpi, ò odori soavi, ò gusti dilettevoli, ò uditi piacevoli, ò tangibili molli, sì che paia leggendo, ò vedendo, vedere odorare, gustare, udire, ò toccare…' Giulio Camillo Delminio, *Le idee, overo forme della oratione da Hermogene considerate, et ridotte in questa lingua* (Udine, 1594), p. 87r.

[122] 'Non si vanti ne Titiano di havervi con divina, ne mai conosciuta maniera di colori dal vero ritratto; ne il Sansovino, o il Danese di sapervi con artificiosa mano scolpire in viva forma: […] percioche delle due vostre imagini la men bella è quella del corpo: e potralla per molti anni la pittura, potralla per molti secoli la scoltura mantenere: ma finalmente, vinta dalla forza del tempo, come tutte l'altre cose, fie guasta, e consumata. La vostra vera imagine, la più perfetta, e di assai maggior bellezza risplendente, è quella dell'animo, e questa durerà sempre. Percioche

Painted and sculpted images are but perishable copies of an image in itself imperfect, says Manuzio. The real image is that of the soul, and that can only be captured in the poet's works, fruit of his mind's inventions, lasting for eternity. A writer does not need artists to portray him; the real portrait he already has, immaterial and thus impervious to the ravages of time. Whether Aretino, only too well aware of the efficacy of real images, both in the present and in the future, agreed with such an interpretation, is of secondary importance.[123] What matters is that propositions on the comparative merits of words and images can be found anywhere in Venetian writings of the time; the debate was obviously on learned people's minds.

This is also shown by a poem of Celio Magno (1536-1602), a fairly well-known poet and member of the Accademia della Fama, too. This composition was to open his own collection of poems and expresses an idea strikingly similar to that of Manuzio:

> Of my earthly and fragile remains
> I do not care to leave behind an image, painted or sculpted
> that promises me help after my death
> against his second most cruel arrow.
>
> This humble Muse of mine, that points towards
> the immortal part with my sweetest thoughts,
> let that be my true image, and let it ardently
> spread its wings to follow its fortune.[124]

Again, we encounter the idea that the works of the poet, and not the painted image of his perishable body, really contain his portrait. This is not to say that Magno did not value painted portraits per se – we know, in fact, that he did,

voi medesimo la dipignete, voi medesimo la scolpite, ed ogni dì meglio con opere nuove, tutte ritratte da propria inventione della mente vostra, e tutte maravigliose, la rappresentate, liberandovi per questa via dalla crudel tirannide del vorace tempo.' Letter from Paolo Manuzio to Pietro Aretino from Venice, 3 February 1555, from Paolo Manuzio, *Lettere volgari … divise in quattro libri* (Venice, 1560), pp. 112v-114r, here pp. 113r-v.

[123] On Pietro Aretino and his many portraits in paint, print and sculpture, see above, Chapter Two, *Excursus*.

[124] 'Non de la spoglia mia terrena, e frale/ Curo effigie lasciar pinta, ò scolpita/ Ch'a me prometta dopo morte aita/ Contra il secondo suo più crudo strale.// Questa humil Musa mia, che l'immortale/ Parte co miei pensier più dolci addita/ Sia di me vera imago: e spieghi ardita/ Sua fortuna seguendo intorno l'ale.' B.N.M., It. IX. 158 (= 7333), *Rime di Celio Magno*, c. 1. This is a later version of the sonnet referred to above, n. 117.

having his portrait painted by Domenico Tintoretto.[125] A poem like this should be read as a move in a larger debate in which participation and continuation were more important than winning and concluding.[126] It was a debate that not only questioned the relative merits of poetry and painting, but also of the poet and the painter. With an opening statement like this, Celio Magno is making a claim about his art and his own identity as practitioner of that art. Yet at the same time it is the expression of a Platonic ideal, of the ultimate victory of the spiritual over the physical.[127]

In his *Dialogue on love*, the Paduan philosopher and probable friend of Titian Sperone Speroni (1500-1588; fig. 67) at first seems to express an idea very similar to that found in Manuzio's letter or in Magno's sonnet: the whole world is a portrait of God, one of the interlocutors says, but the painter's portrait is less good than all other portraits, for it shows nothing but a person's colour of skin and fails to go beyond that.[128] One of the other participants in the debate, however, objects, and it is admitted: the portraits of Titian surpass nature and contain a '*non sò che* of divinity'.[129] The dialogue continues:

> Aretino does not portray things less well in words than Titian does in colours. I have seen sonnets of his to some of Titian's portraits, and it is not easy to determine whether these sonnets are born from the portraits or the portraits from the sonnets; certainly, together, that is the sonnet and the portrait, they are a perfect thing. The one gives a voice to the portrait; the other, in turn,

[125] This portrait seems no longer extant.

[126] For more information on openness and plurality in renaissance discourse in general, see Valeska von Rosen, 'Multiperspektivität und Pluralität der Meinungen im Dialog: zu einer vernachlässigten kunsttheoretischen Gattung', in: Valeska von Rosen and Klaus Krüger (eds.), *Der stumme Diskurs der Bilder: Reflexionsformen des Ästhetischen in der Kunst der Frühen Neuzeit*, Munich 2003, pp. 317-336.

[127] On the role of platonism in the Accademia della Fama, see especially Lina Bolzoni, 'L'Accademia Veneziana: splendore e decadenza di una utopia enciclopedica', in: Laetitita Boehm and Ezio Raimondi (eds.), *Università, accademie e società scientifiche in Italia e in Germania dal Cinquecento al Settecento*, Bologna 1981, pp. 117-167, here p. 130 and further.

[128] On Speroni's relation with Titian and with Aretino see D'Elia, *The Poetics of Titian's Religious Paintings*, p. 183.

[129] Sperone Speroni, *Dialoghi … nuovamente ristampati et con molto diligenza riveduti, et corretti* (Venice, 1544), p. 24v.

dresses the sonnet with flesh and bones. I believe that being painted by Titian and praised by Aretino is a new regeneration of men.[130]

In this panegyric to his two friends, Speroni repeats the classical topos that painting is mute poetry and poetry is speaking painting.[131] The conclusion of the passage seems to go further, though. Claiming that having one's portrait painted by Titian and being praised in a sonnet by Aretino leads to as much as a 'nuova regeneratione', Speroni refers to the capacity of the portrait-sonnet combination to stand in for a person in all his or her facets. When painting and poetry on the highest level work together, people are reborn.[132]

In the end, it is not important whether Speroni was right, and Manuzio was wrong – or the other way around. In this playful debate, individual statements are dependent on their contexts; it is the discourse as such that should interest us. What the case of Irene di Spilimbergo makes clear is that we may take this discourse more literally than has been done before.

A Fragmented Image

Be this as it may, the idea that poetry can portray a person also raises a pressing question. For whose portrait is it that Irene's memorial collection really paints? Is it only Irene's, or is it perhaps also a very fragmented portrait of

[130] 'Lo Aretino non ritragge le cose men bene in parole, che Titiano in colori: et ho veduto de suoi sonetti fatti da lui d'alcuni ritratti di Titiano: e non è facile il giudicare, se li sonetti son nati dalli ritratti, ò li ritratti da loro: certo ambidui insieme, cioè il sonetto, et il ritratto, sono cosa perfetta: questo da voce al ritratto, quello all'incontro di carne, e d'ossa veste il sonetto. Et credo, che l'essere dipinto da Titiano, e lodato dall'Aretino, sia una nuova regeneratione de gli huomini.' Speroni, *Dialoghi*, pp. 24v-25r.

[131] From the Greek poet Simonides of Ceos (c. 556-468 BC) allegedly are the words 'poetry is vocal painting, as painting is silent poetry'; his is one of the first formulations of what would later become the ut-pictura-poesis doctrine. See Rensselaer W. Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting*, New York 1967, p. 1.

[132] Speroni once had himself painted by Titian, probably around the same time that the reprint of his *Dialogue on love* was published, as he suggests in his testament of 1569: a portrait 'fatto da Tiziano ora sono 25 anni'. This seems to be the portrait now in the Museo Civico in Treviso; see Mario Pozzi, *Trattatisti del Cinquecento*, vol. I, Milan and Naples 1978, pp. 838-40. He refers to this portrait in a letter to a Florentine courtier of 15 September 1579: 'ragionando con Sua Altezza de' fatti miei, voi ascondeste li miei difetti o se per vero mi ritraggeste dal naturale, come fe' già Tiziano. Il qual ritratto in parole sarebbe questo, che, cominciando dalla età mia, io sono un vecchio di ottanta anni, mezo cieco, mezo sordo, onde io sia noia alli amici nel ragionare e nel salutarli…' Speroni here explicitly completes his portrait from life by Titian with a 'portrait in words'. See also Freedman, *Titian's Portraits through Aretino's Lens*, pp. 103-104, and D'Elia, *The Poetics of Titian's Religious Paintings*, p. 183.

almost 150 poets? For this is what Manuzio and Magno argue: that the poet's works 'depict' the poet; that, in a sense, the poet's verses are his self-portrait. To the question of the self-portrait I will return soon; first let me illustrate my point with what is perhaps one of the most remarkable contributions to the volume, at least as far as its author is concerned. This is a poem from the collection's Latin section, titled *Diversorum praestantium poetarum carmina in obitu Irenes Spilimbergiae* (*Songs of various excellent poets at the death of Irene di Spilimbergo*), allegedly written by no-one less than '*Titianus Vecellius*':

> "Excellent Irene, you would have fashioned breathing faces
> in your pictures, and you on your own would have added the beauty that is lacking.
> If the Fates spinning out your slender vital thread
> had not loosened it before its time," a weeping Titian said,
> "then you with your artist's hand would have expressed faces in a more learned way than the ancient Apelles."
> Then Death said, "That heaven be decorated with your painting,
> is right. You, Titian, are enough for the world."[133]

Although it is questionable whether Titian actually wrote this poem – most scholars agree that he had not mastered Latin – we need not doubt that he was somehow involved in its conception.[134] While Jacopo Morelli argued in

[133] 'Egregia poteras spirantes fingere vultus/ Pictura, et quod deest addere sola decus,/ Ante diem tibi ni Irene vitalia nentes/ Stamina solvissent tenuia fila Deae./ Dixerat illacrymans prisco Titianus Apelle/ Exprimere artifici doctior ora manu:/ Cum mors caelum, inquit, pictura ornarier huius/ Dignum est: orbi unus tu Titiane sat es.' Atanagi, *Diversorum praestantium poetarum carmina in obitu Irenes Spilimbergiae*, p. 56. The English translation is adapted from Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance "Virtuosa"*, p. 181.

[134] The question of Titian's degree of education has a long history. It goes at least back to Erwin Panofsky, whose iconological reading of Titian's paintings presupposed the artist's mastering of Latin. In the context of an article on sixteenth-century erotic imagery, Carlo Ginzburg argued against Panofsky and others stating that Titian did not know Latin. See Erwin Panofsky, *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic*, New York 1969, and Ginzburg, 'Tiziano, Ovidio e i codici della figurazione erotica nel Cinquecento'. Recent contributions to this still lively debate are Thomas Puttfarken, *Titian and Tragic Painting: Aristotle's Poetics and the Rise of the Modern Artist*, New Haven 2005 (see esp. pp. 69-73); D'Elia, *The Poetics of Titian's Religious Paintings*. An exception among current writers is Lionello Puppi, who recently argued that the master did have knowledge of Latin and possessed many (Latin) books: see his 'La biblioteca di Tiziano', in: idem (ed.), *Tiziano: l'ultimo atto*, Milan 2007, pp. 255-266, here pp. 255-256.
A possible ghostwriter is Giovan Maria Verdizotti (1525-1600), a writer and painter/printmaker who worked in Titian's workshop, helped the master in writing letters, and

1800 that it was a grandson of the famous painter who is meant here, what I am interested in is that this particular poem carries the artist's name and that his name is thus connected to all those other names of Italian *letterati* of his time.[135] Titian, the painter whom poets all over Italy tried to emulate in their verses, here, as it is suggested, himself takes up the poet's quill and reflects on his art. While he normally needed others to praise his work, he now does it himself, and that makes this poem into his ultimate hegemony. Strikingly, it is thereby not at all about whom it claims to be: the deceased Irene di Spilimbergo. No, Titian's poem is clearly about Titian: '*orbi unus tu Titiane sat es*'.

Titian's contribution certainly does not stand alone in its self-reflectivity. But while the memorial collection thus certainly gives us portraits of as many poets as have contributed, this is not the only reason why we may consider it as *fragmented*. For also in the image it gives us of Irene, the fragment stands out. We have seen already how Lodovico Dolce praises her 'divine and celestial aspect, the gold, the roses, and the bright white ivory'; other poets, too, acclaim her eyes which sparkled like stars, her beautiful face, her beautiful or learned hand, her locks of gold.[136] Some also praise her beautiful character, her chastity and innocence, or her poetical and painterly talent, with which she surpassed Apelles, Parrhasius, and Apollo himself; but never do they integrate these aspects into one consistent whole. We can easily see that the praise Irene di Spilimbergo receives is, firstly, very conventional and, secondly, it is always focused on a part of her; never does the reader get a complete image.

also contributed to Irene's memorial collection under his own name (*Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*, p. 80 and further). On Verdizotti and his relation with Titian, see Massimo Favilla and Ruggero Rugolo, ' "Da un medesimo autore la poesia e la pittura": Giovanni Mario Verdizzotti, tra Tiziano e Tasso', in: Puppi, *Tiziano: l'ultimo atto*, pp. 55-68; Giorgio Padoan, 'Titian's Letters', in: Susanna Biadene, Antonio Paolucci and Sharon Hecker (eds.), *Titian: Prince of Painters*, Munich 1990, pp. 43-52, here p. 48; Giuseppe Venturini, *Cinquecento minore: O. Ariosti, G.M. Verdizotti e il loro influsso nella vita e nell'opera del Tasso*, Ravenna 1970.

[135] Marcantonio Michiel, *Notizia d'opere di disegno nella prima meta del secolo 16. esistenti in Padova Cremona Milano Pavia Bergamo Crema e Venezia scritta da un anonimo di quel tempo …*, ed. Jacopo Morelli, Bassano 1800, pp. 234-235. For the poem in connection with Titian's circle of literate friends, see also Grosso, *Per la fama di Tiziano nella cultura artistica dell'Italia spagnola*, pp. 115-119; Tagliaferro and Aikema, *Le botteghe di Tiziano*, p. 171.

[136] For Dolce's sonnet, see above, p. 157.

These findings are hardly surprising given the poetical tradition in which the memorial collection stands. One of the first women to be honoured with a collection of poems, Irene reminds us of that other Italian woman who was the subject of a large sonnet sequence: Laura, protagonist of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*.[137] While Laura was the distant object of Petrarch's painful love, Irene can well be considered as the distant object of desire of all those 143 poets.

Just as Irene's collection, the *Canzoniere* praises parts of a woman's body, yet never does one get a complete image of her – not to mention the fragmentary character of the work itself (in the English-speaking world also known as *Scattered Rhymes*). The separate parts of the beloved woman, her golden tresses, rose cheeks, slender neck, and teeth like pearls, are lauded as if they were precious stones, or, in other words, as if they were just things. Later lyricists writing in the Petrarchan style have imitated this on a large scale. John Freccero, writing on Petrarch's poetics, argues that each part of Laura's body signifies her entire person; because no such complete image of her body exists, however, all those parts remain separate and reveal that there is nothing behind it. Thus, the poet venerates the object, not the beloved herself: 'Her virtues and her beauties are scattered like the objects of fetish worship: her eyes and hair are like the gold and topaz on the snow, while the outline of her face is lost […] Like the poetry that celebrates her, she gains immortality at the price of vitality and historicity.'[138] While Freccero concludes that the reader himself has to combine these 'gemlike qualities' into an idealized unity, other scholars, more oriented towards feminism, argue that what they see as the disintegration of the female beloved is a *sine qua non* for the unity of the male.[139]

Interestingly, in Venice this stress on the fragmentary was not confined to lyrical poetry only. Attention for the fragment is also apparent in a religious context. As Ronda Kasl argues in an essay on Giovanni Bellini's devotional

[137] For a thorough analysis of the *Canzoniere*, see Stierle, *Francesco Petrarca*, part VI; for its fragmentary character see also John Freccero, 'The Fig Tree and the Laurel: Petrarch's Poetics', *Diacritics* 5 (1975), pp. 34-40.
[138] Freccero, 'The Fig Tree and the Laurel', p. 39.
[139] Nancy J. Vickers, 'Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme', in: Elizabeth Abel (ed.), *Writing and Sexual Difference*, Chicago 1982, pp. 95-109; Freccero, 'The Fig Tree and the Laurel'; see also Danijela Kambascovic-Sawers, 'Carved in Living Laurel: The Sonnet Sequence and Transformations of Idolatry', *Renaissance Studies* 21 (2007), pp. 377-394, here especially p. 380.

paintings, devotional exercises were often very fragmentary in character.[140] Kasl gives an example of such an exercise, published in a booklet called *Decor puellarum* (Venice, 1471), a handbook for maidens, a copy of which happens to have been in the library of Irene's grandfather.[141] The exercise is meant to stimulate meditation on eleven separate body parts of the Holy Virgin: the feet that carried Christ, the womb in which he was conceived, the heart that believed Gabriel's message, the breasts, the hands, the mouth and tongue, the lips, the nose, the ears and eyes; all these parts together are meant to summon up a complete mental image of the Virgin, one detail at a time. Kasl argues, furthermore, that devotees found assistance in physical images, such as the many *Madonnas* produced in Giovanni Bellini's workshop. If we look at an example, a *Madonna and Child* by Bellini also known as the *Greek Madonna* (Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera), we see that the various body parts of mother and child are very important (fig. 68). Mary's large and expressive hands, which tenderly touch the body of her son, leap to the eye. The baby Jesus' feet mark the picture's lower edge; his right thumb only just touches the hand of his mother. Her large and meditative eyes and brow are framed by a carefully arranged veil, which, with its dark blue colour, makes the clear skin of her face stand out. In this way, I agree with Kasl, the painting's design facilitates meditation and guides the viewer's attention. To be sure, this preference for the fragmentary, which we have found in the *Decor puellarum*, is present in much other devotional literature, too, for example in the widely read *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola.

All this brings us to another ideal embodied by Irene di Spilimbergo: that of the female Counter-Reformation saint. For not only does her poem collection model Irene on Petrarch's Laura: her biography also clearly bears similarities to contemporary hagiography.[142] This is apparent in the enumeration

[140] Ronda Kasl, 'Holy Households: Art and Devotion in Renaissance Venice', in: Ronda Kasl (ed.), *Giovanni Bellini and the Art of Devotion*, Indianapolis 2004, pp. 59-89, here pp. 79-80.

[141] Giovanni di Dio, *Decor puellarum* (Venice: Nicolas Jenson, 1471). For Da Ponte's collection, see Scalon, *La biblioteca di Adriano di Spilimbergo*, p. 96-97: 'Inventario fatto per mes. Zuan Paolo fo de mes. Ludovico […] Item no. 4, Decor puelarum in quarto de ffoglio ligado ut supra'.

[142] See also Romeo De Maio, *Donna e Rinascimento*, Milan 1987, p. 155. Regarding the role of hagiography in the construction of Irene's image my point of view differs from Anne Jacobson Schutte's, who chose to emphasize the secular character of the biography in order to present

of her many virtues such as humility and prudence, in her interior and exterior beauty, her reluctance to marry, and in her hunger for books and learning. Most conspicuously it comes to the fore in the section about her death: Irene does not value her body, 'which is nothing but vile mud and a little dust', and tries to die a good Christian death, as much as she can 'in the grace of the Lord God'.[143] Once dead, she becomes a mediator, and, again very much like a Christian saint, she turns out to be much more powerful dead than alive.[144]

To conclude, Irene, called 'martyr', 'saint', and 'divine' throughout the volume, becomes disintegrated in the cooperative devotional exercise that is her memorial volume, only to be re-united again in a very much idealized way in the reader's imagination.[145] When Cassandra Giovia promises to follow Irene in her saintly footsteps, she is pointing to the latter's exemplary character, her power to act as *mediatrix*, and to always refer beyond herself to God and the good, much like Dante's Beatrice.[146] Yet in other poems Irene seems to play a different role. There she is compared to her other archetype, Laura, of whom commentators have often noted how she is nothing but a 'brilliant surface, a pure signifier whose momentary exteriority to the poet serves as an Archimedean point from which he can create himself.'[147] If

Irene di Spilimbergo as an 'example… of women's creative possibilities' (Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', pp. 48 and further; for the quote see p. 57).

[143] *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*: '… quando l'era ricordato, che ella dovesse havere alcun respetto alla vita sua; rispondeva. A che haver tanto riguardo a questo corpicciuolo, che altro non è che vil fango, e poca polvere?' And: '… risolve l'animo a due cose, degne di somma lode: l'una di morir christianamento, et quanto piu poteva in gratia del Signor Dio…' See for comparison the lives of saints written by Pietro Aretino; his Catherine of Alexandria and Thomas Aquinas are both extremely inquisitive, and just like Irene, his young Virgin Mary is very beautiful but not willing to get married. See *La vita di Maria Vergine* (Venice, 1539); *La vita di Catherina Vergine* (s. l., 1540); and *La vita di San Tomaso Signor d'Aquino* (Venice, 1543).

[144] See Peter Burke, 'How to be a Counter-Reformation saint', in: Kaspar von Greyerz (ed.), Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800, London / Boston 1984, pp. 45-55, here p. 49.

[145] See, for example, ' 'l martir nostro' (Bernardo Tasso, p. 12) and 'vengo seguendo sue vestigia sante' (Cassandra Giovia, p. 16).

[146] Freccero, 'The Fig Tree and the Laurel', p. 39. For Cassandra Giovia's words, see above. The full stanza reads: 'Et io, che fra le tue devote tante/ Illustri Donne (et o non sia gia invano)/ Vengo seguendo sue vestigia sante'. In the first line of her sonnet, Giovia calls Irene 'esempio'.

[147] Freccero, 'The Fig Tree and the Laurel', p. 39. For Petrarch's concept of the fragment, see also Stierle, *Francesco Petrarca*, p. 525 and further. The comparison with Beatrice and Laura was

'Laura' is the poet's self, then 'Irene' is the inevitably fragmented self-celebration of Italian poetic society. The 'true', historical person Irene on the other hand hardly played a role in this.

A Debate of Vital Importance: Irene di Spilimbergo Paints Her Self-Portrait

So far, we have studied the painted and written portraits of Irene di Spilimbergo and examined how these were intended to function. In the last part of this chapter we will continue our work on the poem collection; but while heretofore we have approached it as an object being on a par with the painted portrait, we will now study what the texts have to say *about* the art of painting. The memorial volume gives a unique impression of a debate on the art of painting in relation to life and death. For as we will see, paintings were not only believed to give sitters an afterlife; they were also believed to kill.

In this debate, the figure of the artist stands out. As we go along, we will therefore learn about Irene as a paintress – 'gentle Irene, true example of that ancient Irene', as one contributor to the volume called her.[148] What kind of paintings did Irene di Spilimbergo really make? Unfortunately, her oeuvre can hardly be reconstructed, as almost only anecdotal evidence is available. According to her sixteenth-century biography, she copied a number of pictures by Titian; later sources generally mention a Noah and the Ark, a Flood, and a Flight into Egypt, as well as a Saint Sebastian.[149] As a number of poems in the collection suggest, Irene also made at least one self-portrait (tentatively,

also made by Irene's contemporaries: see Dolce's lines, as quoted in n. 94; see also one of Bernardo Tasso's contributions to the volume, p. 12: 'La tua salita in cielo alma felice/ Cantano i cigni d'Adria; e nel lor canto/ Il nome, e i pregi tuoi inalzan tanto,/ Che di pari ten vai con Laura, e Bice'.

[148] '… Irene gentil, essempio vero/ Di quella Irene antica…' Federico Frangipane, p. 36. Frangipane refers to the ancient Greek paintress Irene, daughter and pupil of Cratinus, as we learn from Pliny, *Natural History*, 35.40.147. Boccaccio also devoted a biography to this Irene in his *De claris mulieribus*, widely read in the early modern period.

[149] *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*: 'Percioche in ispatio d'un mese, e mezzo, trasse copia d'alcune pitture del detto S. Titiano…' Strikingly, these are the only works mentioned in the biography; any invention of her own is lacking. As Fredrika Jacobs argues, this is in line with the way in which female artists were usually represented in the sixteenth century: as able copyists of a man's creations: see Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance "Virtuosa"*, p. 58. It is only in later periods that other works have been attributed to Irene: according to Ruggero, all references to actual paintings allegedly made by Irene di Spilimbergo only date back as far as the eighteenth century (Zotti, *Irene di Spilimbergo*, p. 34). See further Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 53.

fig. 70).[150] This need not surprise us: as far as this genre is concerned, Irene had in her teacher Titian an excellent example.[151] What is more, Irene's biographer states that it was precisely a self-portrait, actually one by Sofonisba Anguissola (c. 1532-1625), and the praise this work received that urged Irene to start painting (for example, fig. 69):

> Having been shown a portrait of Sofonisba Anguissola, made by her own hand and presented to king Philip, and hearing her marvellously praised for her mastering of the art of painting, [Irene] was moved by generous emulation and completely burned with a warm desire to equal that noble and valorous girl.[152]

It is unclear whether such a self-portrait is still extant; nonetheless the notion of self-portraiture is particularly interesting in the context of this chapter. In a self-portrait everything comes together: artist, prototype and often even viewer are one and the same person. Apart from that, it was not unusual, as I will argue, to consider self-portraiture as the paradigm of the art of painting. That the memorial collection presents Irene as a maker of self-portraits makes her into an archetypal painter; which makes the contents of the collection all the more relevant.

[150] Schutte mentions an alleged self-portrait in the deposits of the Museo Civico in Padua; see Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 45, n. 15. As Franca Pellegrini, one of the museum's curators, communicated to me, however, the portrait referred to should be identified with a *Portrait of a Lady* in the collection of the museum's picture gallery, which is attributed to the workshop of Alessandro Varotari, called Il Padovanino (1588-1649). According to Oliviero Ronchi, *Guida storico-artistica di Padova e dintorni*, Padua 1922, p. 149, this would be a copy that Padovanino made of a portrait of Irene di Spilimbergo by Titian. The portrait has recently been published, with further bibliography, in Davide Banzato and Franca Pellegrini (eds.), *Lo spirito e il corpo: 1550 – 1650: cento anni di ritratti a Padova nell'età di Galileo*, Milan 2009, cat. no. 34, pp. 63 and 99.

[151] On Titian's self-portraits, see, among others, Jodi Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance*, Cambridge 2000, chapter three; Joanna Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist*, New Haven 1998, pp. 159-167.

[152] 'Essendole fatto vedere un ritratto di Sofonisba Anguisciola, fatto di sua mano, et appresentato al Re Filippo; e sentendo maravigliose lodi di lei nell'arte della pittura, mossa da generosa emulatione, s'accese tutta d'un caldo desiderio di pareggiar quella nobile, e valorosa donzella.' Atanagi, *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*. Much has recently been written about women artists and their self-portraits; for the early modern period here I refer to Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (eds.), *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Postmodernism*, Berkeley 2005, which contains several useful contributions; Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*, part four; and Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance "Virtuosa"*.

Regarding Irene as a painter of self-portraits, the most pregnant contribution to the volume comes from the Neapolitan poetess Laura Terracina (1519-c. 1577), who added the following sonnet:

In glory Jupiter shines, surrounded with honour,
for having made such a beautiful idol on earth,
when he, too, finds himself with the others
in the amorous and sweet labyrinth.

But then he gets afraid, that, when she has painted
her own beautiful face, and watching her own portrait
in that moment, in that act
her beauty would not die with her body.

In its greenest and freshest age
at the loveliest and most flourishing moment
he wanted to remove her graceful face

So that such virtue with such beauty
would not have the cruel and unheard-of end
that had the handsome Narcissus in the clear water.[153]

The poem gives us an alternative, mythical explanation for the end of Irene's life. Jupiter, afraid that Irene might lose herself in the self-portrait she painted, takes her away, so that she will not end up the way Narcissus did. Let us look at the sonnet into more detail. The first stanza talks about Jupiter, who has created an 'Idol' – it actually does not call Irene by name. In line with Petrarchan lyric, we may interpret this idol as the object of the poet's longing; an

[153] 'Giva di gloria Giove, e d'honor cinto/ D'haver in terra un si bel Idol fatto/ Quando trovossi anch'ei con glialtri a fatto/ Ne l'amoroso et dolce laberinto// Ma timido dapoi, che se dipinto/ Havesse ella il bel volto; nel ritratto/ Proprio mirando, in quel punto, e'n quell'atto/ Con la beltà non fusse il corpo estinto// Volse ne la piu verde et fresca etade/ Et nel piu vago tempo, et piu fiorito/ Ritorre al mondo il suo leggiadro viso// Accioche tal virtù con tal beltade/ Non facessero il fin crudo, e'naudito/ Che fè ne l'acque chiare il bel Narciso.' *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*, p. 118. Terracina was one of the most published poets in sixteenth-century Italy, and certainly the most prolific female poet. She was a member of the Neapolitan Academia degli Incogniti and published eight volumes of poetry, most of them in Venice. For a short biography as well as bibliographical information, see Nancy Dersofi, 'Laura Terracina', in: Diana Maury Robin, Anne R. Larsen, and Carole Levin (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Women in the Renaissance: Italy, France, and England*, Santa Barbara 2007, pp. 356-359; also Giorgio Masi, 'La lirica e i trattati d'amore', in: *Storia della letteratura italiana*, vol. IV, *Il primo cinquecento*, Rome 1996, pp. 595-680, here p. 635.

image that ultimately reflects the poet's self.[154] Jupiter gets entangled in that 'sweet labyrinth': he falls in love with his own creation. The second stanza in a certain sense echoes the first. The idol creates another idol, for Irene paints herself. Yet, Jupiter wants to save her from the same terrible fate as was Narcissus', and thus, she dies, remaining forever innocent and young. Would she normally have grown old and the distance between her real and her painted face have become unbridgeable, she now for ever remains in the climax of her youth, with her self-portrait as a relic of her incredible beauty.

It is the comparison with Narcissus that makes Terracina's sonnet particularly interesting. The paintress Irene is compared with the handsome youth from classical mythology, who fell in love with his own reflection. There is even a source which attributes the invention of painting to Narcissus – and a pretty authoritative source at that, Leon Battista Alberti's *Della pittura*:

> … I am used to telling my friends that the inventor of painting was Narcissus, who, according to the poets, was turned into a flower; for, as painting is the flower of all the arts, so the tale of Narcissus fits our purpose perfectly. For what else is painting but the act of embracing by means of art the surface of the pool?[155]

Alberti's suggestion, allegedly familiar in his humanist environment, but certainly less known to us, was later taken up by the Venetian painter and theorist Paolo Pino (1534-1565), who wrote in his *Dialogo di pittura* (1548; *Dialogue on painting*) about the advantages of painting over sculpture:

> … [painting] partakes less of that mechanical and laborious side of art, which the intellect shuns as antipathetic to itself; but it welcomes painting with such a sweet disposition that painters melt and are transformed, as Narcissus was at the image of his own beauty.[156]

[154] Kambascovic-Sawers, 'Carved in Living Laurel', p. 380, who quotes Freccero, 'The Fig Tree and the Laurel', pp. 34 and 38.

[155] '… io sono usato dire fra gli amici, che l'inventor de la pittura sia stato quel Narcisso, ilquale secondo l'opinion de i Poeti fu mutato in un fiore. Percioche essendo la pittura fiore di tutte l'arti, tutta la favola di Narcisso alhora si confarà molto a questa materia. Perche che altro è dipingere, che abbracciare con arte quella superficie de la fonte?' Alberti, *La pittura*, p. 19r.

[156] '… [la pittura] partecipa meno del mecanico e laborioso, la qual parte è fuggita dall'intelletto, come suo contrario; ma la pittura è accettata da lui con tal dolcezza, ch'i pittori si liquefanno e si risolveno, come Narciso, nell'imagine della sua beltade.' Paolo Pino, *Dialogo di*

Although we cannot be sure that Laura Terracina was aware of Alberti's construction, it certainly seems likely. As Caroline van Eck and Robert Zwijnenberg have argued, Narcissus realizes that nature can make images; that representation is a procedure of nature.[157] The crux of Alberti's idea is, then, that while Narcissus tries to embrace his reflection in the pool, the painter tries to do so, too, metaphorically: not only is painting a representation of the creations of nature; painting also imitates the natural phenomenon of the creation of images. Images, moreover, that are dangerously lifelike.[158]

The ancient philosopher Aristotle had already assumed that the paradigm of painting was the portrait; as we have seen, Alberti and Pino take this line of reasoning one step further by suggesting that the origin of painting was the reflection of Narcissus in the pool, the first self-portrait.[159] It is this same idea, I believe, that is expressed by Irene's biographer when he chose a self-portrait as the occasion for Irene to go paint, and that also informed Terracina's poem.

In the early modern period, the art of self-portraiture had a place both in the developing notion of the self and in the changing social position of the artist.[160] However, the self-portraits of Irene di Spilimbergo were far from being mainstream: as portraits *of* and *by* a female artist, they were double marvels. Irene's biographer is only too aware of this as he claims Sofonisba Anguissola, Italy's most famous *woman* artist of the time, to be Irene's example. As Joanna Woods-Marsden explains, the female self-portrait, even more so than its male counterpart, was, in all its strangeness, a paradigm of painting; for images of female beauty had a special relationship with art. Art was often symbolized by the image of a beautiful woman, and while beautiful females were held to be miracles of nature, images of female beauty were a miracle of

pittura, ed. Paola Barocchi, *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento*, vol. I, Bari: Laterza 1960, pp. 93-140, here pp. 130-131; the translation is from John Peacock, *The Look of Van Dyck: The* Self-Portrait with a Sunflower *and the Vision of the Painter*, Aldershot 2006, p. 16.

[157] Leon Battista Alberti, *Over de schilderkunst*, ed. Caroline van Eck and Robert Zwijnenberg, translated by Lex Hermans, Amsterdam 1996, pp. 44-47. See also Oskar Bätschmann, 'Albertis Narziss: Entdecker des Bildes', in: Joachim Poeschke and Candida Syndikus (eds.), *Leon Battista Alberti: Humanist – Architekt – Kunsttheoretiker*, Münster 2008, pp. 39-52, here in particular pp. 49-51.

[158] For the figure of Narcissus in Petrarchan poetry, see Peacock, *The Look of Van Dyck*, p. 30 and further; for Narcissus in Petrarch proper see also Stierle, *Francesco Petrarca*, p. 590.

[159] Peacock, *The Look of Van Dyck*, p. 17.

[160] Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*, especially chapters one and two.

art.[161] This was potentially problematic for female artists who wanted to portray themselves as creative individuals, even more so as creativity was considered a purely male quality. At the same time (self-)portraiture was one of the rare genres that were actually thought suitable for women to work in.[162] As far as Anguissola's self-portraits are concerned, their importance even went so far that they 'played a crucial role in enabling Anguissola to have a career at all'.[163]

While Alberti, as we have seen, locates the origins of painting in a pagan myth, similar ideas about the centrality of the self-portrait can be found in a Christian context. There, the procedure of painting on canvas was not so much invented as given to mankind, not just by one of the saints but by Christ himself, who impressed his features on St Veronica's *Sudarium*. The paradox here is that this most archetypal painting in Christianity was in fact believed to be un-painted.[164] As the first and most authentic, since unmediated, image of Christ and visual record of his appearance in the flesh, it served as a justification for the use of Christian images.[165] The perhaps clearest exploration of the relation between self-portraiture and the *Vera Icon* is of course Albrecht Dürer's *Self-Portrait* in Munich (fig. 71); without wanting to go into the specificities of Dürer's invention, let me here quote the closing passage of Nicolas of Cusa's *De Visione Dei*, brought in connection with Dürer's painting by Joseph Koerner, in which Cusanus describes how all of our individual destinies together form a self-portrait of God:

> You, O Lord, who works all things for Your own sake, created this whole world on account of the intellectual nature. You created as if You were a Painter who mixes different colours in order, at length, to be able to paint Himself – to the end that He may have an image of Himself wherein He Himself may take delight and His artistry may rest. Although the Divine

[161] Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*, p. 192.
[162] For self-portraiture as the emblem of (female) virtue, see also Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*, p. 124.
[163] Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*, p. 193.
[164] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p. 65. Indeed, neither did Alberti's Narcissus literally paint.
[165] Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p. 149 and further; Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*, p. 84 and further.

> Painter is one and is not multipliable, He can nevertheless be multiplied in the way in which this is possible: viz., in a very close likeness.[166]

Sixteenth-century Venetians were certainly familiar with the more general idea that God created man in his own likeness, and that man is thus, in a certain sense, a self-portrait of God. This is also what we may infer from the following words of Giorgio Gradenigo in a letter addressed to Giulia da Ponte, Irene's mother:

> I felt myself taking away my thoughts from these earthly beauties and bring them to the contemplation of our Lord God and how infinitely I am obliged to Him. Having done this for a good amount of time, addressing the benefits that I have received and still receive from His immense gentleness, to begin with thinking that he created me a man in an image and figure similar to Himself.[167]

It is precisely in the process of self-reflection, as Gradenigo describes, that man comes most closely to his Creator, to God, the ultimate artist. The self-portrait, as an artistic performance of self-reflection, becomes the ultimate expression of art.

Nature Jealous of Art

Let us here return to Irene – who, for that matter, is herself called a mirror who teaches other people about virtuousness.[168] Above, we have already seen several times that painting was sometimes considered a dangerous activity. The same fear is visible in a sonnet written by the Neo-Platonic philosopher Francesco Patrizi:

[166] Quoted from Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*, p. 132. For Albrecht Dürer and Venetian painting, see Aikema and Brown, *Renaissance Venice and the North*.

[167] '… io mi sentii levare il pensiero da queste vaghezze terrene e portarlo alla contemplazione del Signor Dio e egli infiniti oblighi ch'io le tengo. Nella quale fermatomi per buon ispazio di tempo, e rivolgendo tra me i beneficî che ho ricevuti e ricevo ognora dalla Sua immensa benignità, incominciando dallo avermi fatto uomo d'imagine e figura simile a sé…' Letter from Giorgio Gradenigo to Giulia da Ponte, undated, published in several sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century letter collections; for a modern publication see Acquaro Graziosi, *Giordio Gradenigo*, pp. 121-123 (quoted passage on p. 122).

[168] 'Che i fati Irene bella han tolto a noi,/ Ch'era del sommo ben specchio a di nostri […] Che'l mondo ancor da lei virtute impara.' Daniel Priuli in Atanagi, *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*, p. 27.

While divine Irene with her hands
applies to mortal canvas the eternal Idea
of beauty that she has in her mind and face,
to let her earthly works rival with God,

And with shadows and colours and full lights
she makes it all, this living Goddess
breathed her own breath into them, so that real life
started to breathe in painted veins.

But the fragile work, that had real similarity
to eternal beauty, was not viable,
and her loose spirit rose towards God.

What a marvellous and painful memory:
to give others life while letting it part from oneself.
If only there was at least one to relief our grief![169]

Patrizi's sonnet puts forward the idea that Irene gave life to her paintings, but herself had to die. Read in a Christian way, she is a pelican, who feeds others with her own blood; Irene's self-sacrifice is that of Christ. Indeed, as Patrizi has it, she wants to emulate God (*pareggiar con Dio*).

Other poems in the volume seem to echo this idea. Terracina's poem, discussed above, plays upon a rivalry between Irene and the classical god Jupiter. However, in classically oriented poems such as this, self-sacrifice is not a theme; these poems talk about overconfidence, jealousy, and punishment. Several times Irene is compared with Arachne, the mythical girl who boasted that her weaving skills were greater than those of the goddess Athena, and as a punishment for her *hubris* was turned into a spider: 'The beautiful hand,' Domenico Venier writes, 'that, operating the needle, more than one time beated Arachne, and with an audacious paintbrush almost gave a soul to

[169] 'Mentre con le sue man la diva Irene,/ Pon in tela mortal l'eterna Idea/ De la beltà, che'n mente, e'n volto havea/ Per pareggiar con Dio l'opre terrene;// E con ombre, e colori, e lumi piene/ Fa tutte parti; quella viva Dea/ Suo spirto lor spirò, che vita ardea/ Vera spirar in adombrate vene:// Ma l'opra fral, che vera havea sembianza/ De l'eterna beltà, non prese vita:/ E'l spirto sciolto a Dio levossi a volo.// O mirabil, e acerba rimembranza:/ Vita altrui dar, e far da se partita:/ Fosse almen l'una, a consolarne il duolo.' *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*, p. 40.

whom she painted…'[170] Part of Arachne's punishment stemmed from her failure to acknowledge the goddess as the one who had conferred her skills upon her in the first place. Patrizi suggests a similar defect on Irene's part, thinking herself an earthly goddess and trying to emulate God's creation. 'With much artifice and mastery she made many real forms breathe on living paper, so that nature became jealous with art.'[171] No doubt Terracina's Jupiter was envious of her self-portrait too. Or, as one anonymous contributor, usually identified with Gradenigo, described: 'She was a true miracle of your sex, ladies, this one, and it suffices to say that she reached where man is not allowed to go'.[172]

But where exactly is man not allowed to go? What did Irene do that was so overconfident? Patrizi already provided us with an answer: she tried to breathe life into her paintings. The poetess Girolama Corsi, active in the latter half of the fifteenth century, was already well aware of the danger inherent in that act: regarding her portrait painted by Vittore Carpaccio, she wrote: 'But heaven did not like his behaviour, saying that a mortal man appropriates and steals the power belonging to nature when he makes a piece of wood seem a living body.'[173] Verdizotti in his contribution to Irene's volume mentioned 'the living images, with beautiful colours extracted from her idea';

[170] 'La bella man, che l'ago oprando vinse/ Più volte Arachne; e col pennello audace/ Diè quasi spirto a quel, che'n carte pinse' Domenico Venier in Atanagi, *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*, p. 33; see also Celio Magno: 'La bella man, che mille cor gentili/ Si dolcemente in nobil laccio avinse;/ E di si bei lavor tela distinse,/ Ch'a suoi fur già d'Aracne i pregi humili', *ibid.*, p. 17.

[171] 'Fè con tanto artificio, e magistero/ Spirar piu forme vere in vive carte;/ Che portò invidia la natura a l'arte'. Federico Frangipane in Atanagi, *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*, p. 36.

[172] 'Vero miracol fù del vostro sesso/ Donne costei: e questo a dirne basti,/ Che giunse ov'ir ad huom non è concesso.' Atanagi, *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*, p. 178.

[173] 'Ma i' ciel non volse questo comportare/ dicendo un uom mortal usurpa e fura/ quanto di potestate ebbe natura,/ che fa che un legno un corpo vivo pare.' Quoted from Vittorio Rossi, 'Di una rimatrice e di un rimatore del secolo XV: Girolama Corsi Ramos e Jacopo Corsi', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 15 (1890), pp. 183-211, here p. 194; the article is also useful for more information on Corsi. See also Marianne Albrecht-Bott, *Die bildende Kunst in der italienischen Lyrik der Renaissance und des Barock: Studie zur Beschreibung von Portraits und anderen Bildwerken unterbesonderer Berücksichtigung von G.B. Marinos* Galleria, Wiesbaden 1976, p. 144.

Giacomo Zane wrote that 'she gave shadows and lights to embroidery, and breath and life to dead colours.'[174]

In their book on artists' legends, Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz devoted some pages to the notion of the artist breathing life into his works.[175] As they argue, in artists' stories the admiration for this almost supernatural skill is intimately connected with fear; for where will this skill lead to and with what power will it endow these artists? And so these stories have usually not such good endings, that is, as far as the artist is concerned. In his 1568 biography of Giulio Romano, for example, Vasari adds an epitaph about Jupiter's revenge on the painter-architect: 'When Juppiter saw that the bodies, sculpted and painted by the virtue of Giulio Romano, were breathing, and that the buildings of the mortals equalled those in heaven, inflamed with anger he convened the council of all the gods and took him away from the earth.'[176] Legends like these have a circulation far beyond early modern Italy. The ever returning element: mortals are punished for creating things that only the gods should create. It may not come as a surprise, then, that Irene did not succeed in her life-giving enterprise. God is almighty, and the soul she blew into her paintings went right away to Him. 'She could not express her mortal figure,' we read in Antonio Tritonio's contribution, 'with her Divine spirit enclosed, so that, despising the art of this world, she wanted to go upwards, where every gentle spirit portrays itself in God.'[177] And Giacomo Zane exclaims: 'Cry, painting, if you are not deprived of sense, like you have shown us already: she, who made you like this, is dead.'[178]

[174] Verdizotti: 'l'imagin vive/ Tratte con bei color dal suo concetto'. Atanagi, *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*, p. 81; Zane: 'Ch'ombre, e lumi a riccami, e spirto, e vita/ Diede a morti colori', *ibid*., p. 56.

[175] Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Die Legende vom Künstler: ein geschichtlicher Versuch*, Vienna 1934, pp. 87-92.

[176] 'VIDEBAT IUPPITER CORPORA SCULPTA PICTAQUE/ SPIRARE ET AEDES MORTALIUM AEQUARIER COELO/ IULII VIRTUTE ROMANI TUNC IRATUS/ CONCILIO DIVORUM OMNIUM VOCATO/ ILLUM E TERRIS SUSTULIT.' Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. V, p. 82. On the dialectics between the life of art and the death of the artist, especially in Vasari's *Vite*, see also Fehrenbach, 'Kohäsion und Transgression', p. 18 and further.

[177] '… non potè esprimer la figura/ Mortal col suo Divin spirto rinchiuso,// Onde sdegnando l'arte di qua giuso/ Volle sciolta salir là, dove in Dio/ Ogni spirto gentil si raffigura.' Antonio Tritonio in Atanagi, *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*, p. 5.

[178] 'Piagni pittura, se di senso priva/ Non sei, che già nol mostri: è spenta quella,/ Che tal ti fece. Ah cruda, ah fera stella,' Atanagi, *Rime … in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo*, p. 55.

Had Irene lived in pagan antiquity, her story would have ended here; but as she lived her Christian life in sixteenth-century Venice, piously, 'as much as she could in the grace of the Lord God', her story continues. We may illustrate this with a last passage from her biography, which explains her death in a truly Christian manner:

> With these noble and excellent ways of living and with this continuous development of those singular virtues, *Sig.* Irene reached the age of eighteen. At that time the Lord God, having given her so much excellence, and then calling her with him in the flower of her years, perhaps wanted to let us know in a single moment and through a single person his love and his power, as well as the capacity of this short mortal life. And he planted in her mind and in that of her sister the idea to work together on the art of painting; and to labour in the acquisition of that noble art.[179]

Here, Irene's death as a result of her painterly activities is presented as the outcome of God's plan. He makes her an *exemplum*; she is a tool in his hands. To fully comprehend this, it suffices to take a final look at Titian's portrait of the woman in Washington and think a while about that most remarkable attribute behind her back, the palm.[180] By now, we may get a sense of what this attribute points at. Speroni Speroni argued that Titian glorified the people whom he portrayed: 'Titian is not a painter, and his virtue is not art, but a miracle. […] His portraits truly have a *non sò che* of divinity in them: just like heaven is the paradise of souls, so God has invested [Titian's] colours with the paradise of our bodies, not painted but sanctified and glorified by his

[179] 'Con queste nobili, et eccellenti maniere di vivere, et con questo continuo accrescimento di tante, e così singolari virtù la Sig. Irene pervenne alla età d'anni diciotto: nel qual tempo volendo forse il Signor Dio, con haverle fatto dono di tante eccellentie; e poi col chiamarla a se in su'l fiore de gli anni suoi; darci a conoscere in un tempo, et in un soggetto l'amore, e la potenza sua; et insieme la capacità di questa breve vita mortale; lasciò cader nell'animo di lei, e della sorella, di dar opera unitamente alla dipintura: e di faticar nell'acquisto di quell'arte nobilissima.'

[180] There is another portrait by Titian which contains a palm: the *Portrait of an Unknown Man* in the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden, signed and dated 1561, so almost contemporary to *Irene*. Frank Fehrenbach, 'Kohäsion und Transgression', pp. 4-6, argued that in this particular portrait Titian thematized the art of portrait painting itself. Nevertheless, the identity of the sitter remains elusive, as does the meaning of the palm branch: see also *Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister Dresden*, ed. Harald Marx, vol. I, *Die ausgestellten Werke*, Cologne 2005, pp. 224-225.

hands.'[181] Titian's portrait of Irene can be considered a particularly clear illustration of this passage. But something more is going on. As we have seen, Irene died when God decided she would become a painter; her paintings extracted life from her; in short, *she died of painting*. As one would expect from a true and virtuous person, however, she did not pine away from grief as poor Narcissus did over the pool: keeping her mind on the beauty of eternity, she safely arrived in heaven. Irene is therefore, as also her commemorators affirm, a true martyr of painting. And Titian, who, as opposed to Irene herself, did manage to portray her as if she were alive, made her portrait into her martyr's shrine.

At the same time, though, Irene is also a classical heroine, whose portrait by Titian is a witness to her never-ending fame. For do we not also see a laurel crown depicted? In his *Dialogue on colours*, Lodovico Dolce explains the significance of both palm and laurel:

> Cor. [Cornelio] [The Palm] denotes victory: that is what the Palm signifies. That is why Petrarca said: 'The palm is victory: and I, still young, vanquished the world and myself.'
>
> Mar. [Mario] And the Laurel, does that not denote something else than what you've just said?
>
> Cor. Also the Laurel signifies triumph, for when antique Captains triumphed, they adorned their heads with a laurel wreath: for this plant does not burn, and keeps its leafs perpetually green.[182]

[181] 'Titiano non è dipintore, et non è arte la virtu sua, ma miracolo. […] Et veramente li suoi ritratti hanno in loro un non sò che di divinita: che come il cielo è il paradiso dell'anime, cosi pare che ne suoi colori Dio habbia riposto il paradiso de nostri corpi, non dipinti, ma fatti santi, et glorificati dalle sue mani.' Speroni, *Dialoghi*, p. 24v.

[182] 'Mar. Chi mandasse a donare un ramo di Palma? Cor. Costui dinotarebbe vittoria: che cosi significa la Palma. Onde disse il Petrarca:
Palma è vittoria: et io giovane ancora
Vinsi il mondo e me stessa.
Mar. E il Lauro non dinota egli altro, fuor che quello che tu hai detto?
Cor. Significa ancora trionfo, perche i Capitani antichi, quanto trionfavano di una ghirlanda di Lauro si adornavano la testa: perche questa pianta non è mai fulminata, e serba perpetuamente verdi le sue fronde.' Lodovico Dolce, *Dialogo … nel quale si ragiona delle qualità, diversità, e proprietà de i colori* (Venice, 1565), p. 44v.

Conclusion: A Fruitful Afterlife?

Let us recount what this chapter has taught us about Irene di Spilimbergo. She was an extremely gifted young woman from a north-Italian noble house, who after her premature death was celebrated with a painted portrait, thought of as the product of Titian's brush, and with a volume of hundreds of poems composed in her memory. Both the painting, the poems, and her biography – also a part of the volume – help to construct an image of an ideal woman. What is this ideal to which painters and poets refer? Indeed, 'Irene' embodies several ideals at once: she is Laura, the inaccessible beloved of the poet Petrarch, at the same time a real woman and a metaphor for the poet's self; she is Beatrice, the beloved of Dante, who directs the poet towards God; she is a Christian saint, a *mediatrix*, more powerful dead than alive. She is Irene, the paintress from Greek antiquity; she is Arachne, who in weaving rivals with the gods; and she is Emilia, almost identical with her sister. When we try to look beyond those ideals, however, there is hardly anything there. The image we have of Irene is fragmentary; and although all those fragments ultimately point to a whole, this whole is but a shimmering surface. What do we know of the historical person Irene di Spilimbergo (1538-1559)? I am afraid that the answer must be: next to nothing.

As this thesis deals with agency, something also needs to be said about the agency of Irene. This, then, can only have been very limited. Irene's was an indirect agency: as a prototype she informed the images made of her by family, painters, and poets, but in the end, she was mostly a tool in the hands of others. An impotent position she undoubtedly shared with many women of her time. To be sure, for a woman she was extraordinarily educated, and as an alleged paintress and poetess, masculine roles were attributed to her. Yet all of this cannot conceal that agency, just like creativity and *virtù*, was largely considered a male thing. Her painted portrait, on the other hand, did have a strong agency. It literally came to replace her and became Irene's most physical substitute in the earthly realm. Lucky we are, therefore, that the portrait is still with us – albeit in a dark subterranean storage room in Washington, D.C.

It need not surprise us that, when we look at this painted portrait, or read the poems praising her beauty, it is not only Irene di Spilimbergo whom we meet: we also continually encounter the makers of these images. In Venice, the memorial project for Irene di Spilimbergo coincides with an acceleration

in the rise of the *auctor*, the human agent living in historical time who is the maker of the work of art. Both in painting and in poetry, the *auctor*'s role becomes more important, and self-referentiality develops into an important artistic strategy. What makes the memorial project for Irene so relevant in this context is not that it is a prominent example of this development; the main reason we should study the paintings and the poems is that artists use Irene's image to *reflect on* this development. Both the portraits in Washington and the contributions to the poem book voice excitement and fear over the increasing achievements of art; in fact, they praise art itself, and art's increasing possibilities to mirror nature in a lifelike and illusionistic way. Artists discover their own power; but, as this chapter has made clear, they are also afraid of where those powers might lead to.

The last word, however, has to go to Irene's family. If Irene di Spilimbergo's premature death and subsequent celebration in painting and poetry have led to one thing, it is the survival of the Spilimbergo family name – and its continuous association with refinement and art. Having presented its female offspring, Emilia and Irene, as two 'versions' of essentially the same 'thing' – for example in the Washington portraits, where the two sisters have the same posture, the same clothes, and very similar faces – the family was not really harmed by Irene's death. This is perhaps a very cynical conclusion. While Emilia lived on and got married, Irene became famous because she was living no longer; and she thus spread the family's fame. As to the specificities of this fame, we can only speculate. Heretofore, 'Spilimbergo' had mostly stood for vendetta, violence and war: throughout the sixteenth century, the various lords of Spilimbergo fought each other, usurping possessions and murdering each other when they got the chance. The construction of 'Irene di Spilimbergo', then, can well have entailed a message of peace.[183]

[183] About the wars in the Friuli, see Edward Muir, *Mad Blood Stirring: Vendetta & Factions in Friuli during the Renaissance*, Baltimore and London 1993; for Spilimbergo in particular, pp. 179-181. In the eyes of the men involved, the Friuli women did not join in this strife; Friulan men defined their relationships with women, as Edward Muir says, 'an island of repose' (p. 281). For the call for peace inherent in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, which also in this context may have provided an example for the construction of Irene, see Stierle, *Francesco Petrarca*, p. 530 and further.

And what about Emilia, then? She married a Paduan nobleman named Giulio de gli Agugi, and eventually died in 1585, forty-nine years old, making her husband a widower.[184]

[184] Schutte, 'The Image of a Creative Woman', p. 44; Zotti, *Irene di Spilimbergo*, p. 8.

4

Politics, Portraits, and Love

Francesco Bembo, Bianca Capello, and 'the most beautiful contemporary painting in Venice'

In this fourth and last chapter, we return to the portrait of Bianca Capello. As we have seen in the Introduction, the portrait of Capello (1548–1587), the Venetian-born grand duchess of Tuscany, was owned by a Venetian patrician, a certain Francesco Bembo (1544–1599), who, in the summer of 1586, brought it to the Doge's Palace. There, the portrait attended a dinner with the Doge and his guests; it had a private meeting with the Doge and his most trusted friends; and it spent the night in the Doge's apartments. This chapter shows that, in fact, the portrait's visit to the Palace was the climax of a process which had been going on for months, in which the painting attracted the attention of hundreds of people.

It all started on a day in March 1586, when a package was delivered at Francesco Bembo's house. As Bembo confided in a letter to the grand duchess, composed on that same day,

> … after almost half an hour, I unwrapped the portrait, so strongly desired by many, and particularly by me; and I was so pleased by it, that for two whole hours I did nothing but admire it, and contemplate it much to my satisfaction, for in fact, it is very beautiful in every part, and made with particular diligence by the extremely skilful Gaetano.

Bembo continued:

> Having contemplated the portrait on my own for two hours, I carried it upstairs to the Women. An after having held them back a bit, I lifted up the

cloth with which I had it covered. And as if the curtain of a scene was dropped, the people were full of admiration. When the cloth fell, these Women were left stupefied and completely and totally satisfied.[1]

When the cloth was removed that had hidden the portrait from view, the admiration of the women was such that they seemed to be watching the unveiling of a theatre scene. Apparently aware of the theatrical connotations of his act, Bembo turned the painting's revelation into a real spectacle. Describing his deed in terms of a play, he made clear that the painting, too, performed a role. As has been said, this was only the beginning: over the following months the portrait was to become a venerated object with multiple social lives, as it acted as a substitute of Bianca Capello herself, both in a romantic relationship with the painting's owner and on the stage of Venetian and Italian politics.

In his letters to Bianca – he wrote many – Francesco Bembo recorded how hundreds of people came to his house to see the portrait, week after week. At the end of May, an alleged number of seven hundred visitors had dropped by. Bembo diligently recorded people's reactions to his precious possession. He described how people performed certain ritual acts in front of the painting that openly displayed people's devotion to the portrayed lady. He wrote that, on the day he received the painting, his wife tried to kiss it (he had to stop her, afraid that her kiss would damage the paint). That, when the news reached Venice that Bianca had fallen ill, many people came to her portrait to pray in its vicinity. Moreover, many of Venice's top artists, such as Tintoretto, Veronese, and Alessandro Vittoria visited Bembo's house, to view the painting and discuss with the owner the remarkable accomplishment of the painter, Scipione Pulzone da Gaeta.

The veneration of this Venetian portrait of Bianca Capello may be compared with other admired portraits of prominent female sitters, such as Isa-

[1] 'Dapoi quasi mez'hora, scopro il ritratto tanto bramato da tanti, et molto piu da me; e tanto me ne compiacqui, che per due hore intere non feci altro, che amirarlo, et considerarlo, con compita mia satisf.ne, perche in fatti è belliss.o in tutto, et fatto con particolar diligenza del valent.mo Gaetano. […] Contemplato io solo il ritratto due hore, lo porto di sopra dalle Donne; et dapoi l'haverle trattenute un pezzo, levo il panò, [con] che lo havevo coperto. et se al cader delle telle d'una scena, le persone restano amiratrice; queste Donne al levar di questa, restarono stupefatte, e appagate in tutto, e per tutto.' A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5938, c. 707r-v. 'Gaetano' is the nickname of the painter Scipione Pulzone da Gaeta.

bella d'Este in Mantua or Simonetta Vespucci in late fifteenth-century Florence.[2] It may be understood against the background of Italian court culture, in which courtiers bid for the prince's favour, and as part of an economy of exchanging letters, knowledge, portraits, and other gifts. Also, it must be seen in the context of Petrarchism, which was already an important topic in the preceding chapter. We will take all these aspects into account; but we will also see that the veneration of Bianca Capello's portrait was, to a certain extent, unique, regarding both its scale and its importance.

The material on which this chapter is based is largely unpublished.[3] The Archivio di Stato in Florence contains all the letters sent to Bianca Capello during her marriage with the grand duke, Francesco I de' Medici (1541-1587). Among these letters is a significant group written by Francesco Bembo, who in the later 1580s wrote the grand duchess with an almost obsessive regularity about her painted portrait in his possession. I have supplemented this incredibly rich and rare material with other sources, such as letters Bianca Capello returned to Francesco Bembo, diplomatic messages, and poetry. All this allows for a heretofore unattainable amount of detail in our sketch of what was truly a major celebration of a Venetian lady *in effigie*.

In this chapter, we will study the social life of the portrait of Bianca Capello. As we will see, this life was many-sided: the painting had a Platonic love affair with its owner; it was a model for Venetian artists; and it united

[2] Simonetta Vespucci (d. 1476) was the Platonic mistress of Giuliano de' Medici. She was much admired, and much lamented when she died only 23 years old. There are still many paintings said to represent her, but we do not have direct evidence for the ways fifteenth-century viewers responded to these paintings. See Dennis Geronimus, *Piero di Cosimo: Visions Beautiful and Strange*, New Haven and Londen 2006, pp. 48-75. For the playful adoration of a portrait Isabella d'Este at the north-Italian courts, see Sally Hickson, '"To see ourselves as others see us": Giovanni Francesco Zaninello of Ferrara and the portrait of Isabella d'Este by Francesco Francia', *Renaissance Studies* 23 (2009), pp. 288-310. Hickson's account is mainly concerned with the visual and verbal construction of likeness.

[3] In her article on Bernardo Bembo and Leonardo's portrait of Ginevra de' Benci, Jennifer Fletcher refers to Francesco and his promotion of the cult of Bianca Capello: see *The Burlington Magazine* 131 (1989), pp. 811-816, here p. 816. Fletcher refers to Karla Langedijk's catalogue of Medici portraits, in which small bits of Bembo's letters have been published, although with hardly any commentary: Karla Langedijk, *The Portraits of the Medici: 15th - 18th Centuries*, vol. I, Florence 1981, pp. 320-321. Apart from that, the only reference to the letters I have found is in Anna Loredana Zorzi's book on Bianca Capello, published under her pseudonym 'Loredana', but this belongs to the category of popular historiography, like so many writings on the legendary grand duchess (see Anna Loredana Zorzi, *Bianca Cappello: patrizia veneta, granduchessa di Toscana*, Rome 1936, pp. 266-279).

political allies. Thus, this chapter will bring everything together that has been discussed separately in earlier parts of this book: the relation between the image and its prototype, the artist and his agency, and with the owner and other recipients of a painting. The painting itself, its iconography and style, will also play an important part. But first of all, we will get acquainted with Bianca Capello and answer the question why we still know so little about her.

'A figure so notorious for evil'

'Should we not humbly ask pardon from the noble ladies of the Renaissance when we dare to bring into their company a figure so notorious for evil as Bianca Capello?' With this rhetorical question another chapter on the Tuscan grand duchess opens, written by Marian Andrews, writer of historical novels, hardly more than a century ago.[4] In its sensationalism it is paradigmatic for much of the material that has thus far been written on Capello: either depicted as a romantic heroine or a wicked and evil witch, she is the topic of numerous novels, plays and popular histories, rather than a subject for serious scholarship.[5] Even with the increasing interest in women and other marginalized figures that the historical disciplines have shown over the recent decades, Bianca Capello remains an outsider.[6] How did this situation come about?

Already in Bianca's own time, the story of her life assumed mythical proportions. Originating from a wealthy, powerful and ancient Venetian patrician family, at the age of fifteen she ran away with the young accountant Pietro Bonaventuri, who had been working at the Salviati bank opposite the Ca' Capello, near S. Aponal, to his hometown Florence, where the two married. All this had happened without the knowledge and consent of Bianca's father, Bartolomeo, who even undertook legal steps against his daughter and

[4] Christopher Hare [pseudonym of: Marian Andrews], *The Most Illustrious Ladies of the Italian Renaissance*, London 1904, p. 204.

[5] To name just a few examples: Giovanni Sabbatini, *Bianca Capello: quadro drammatico del secolo 16*, Milan 1844; Hector Salomon and Jules Barbier, *Bianca Capello: Opéra en cinq actes*, Paris 1886; Berthe Brevée-Copijn, *Bianca Capello: tooneelspel in vier bedrijven*, Amsterdam 1918; Pierre Gauthiez, *Vie de Bianca Cappello*, Paris 1929.

[6] A fortunate exception is Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, 'Objects and Identity: Antonio de' Medici and the Casino at San Marco in Florence', in: John Jeffries Martin (ed.), *The Renaissance World*, New York and London 2007, pp. 481-500; and see my 'Staging Bianca Capello: Painting and Theatricality in Sixteenth-Century Venice', *Art History* 33 (2010), pp. 278-291.

her husband.[7] In the city where the Medici family ruled, however, the heir to the grand ducal throne Francesco de' Medici took an interest in Bianca and they soon started a love affair. While at first this was also to the benefit of Bianca's husband Pietro, who was rewarded with favours, he ultimately seems to have paid with his life: in 1572 he was murdered with the knowledge and, probably, approval of Francesco. The latter in the meantime had married Giovanna of Austria, scion of the Habsburg family, but this was no reason for him to give up his affair with Bianca; neither was his succession of his father as grand duke in 1574. Bianca had already given birth to a daughter, named Pellegrina after Bianca's mother; in 1576 she provided Francesco with a son named Antonio (fig. 72). When in 1578 Giovanna of Austria unexpectedly passed away, they seized the opportunity and only two months later Francesco and Bianca secretly married. A year later, in October 1579, their marriage was publicly celebrated with several days of festivities; Bianca could now officially call herself grand duchess of Tuscany.

This did not make her any more popular with the Florentine people, however. Her affair with Francesco had been common knowledge, and the Florentines condemned her for taking the place that they thought rightfully belonged to Giovanna of Austria, a devout woman who bore her husband many children and, as a Habsburg princess, had a key position in the duchy's political and economical alliances.[8] Bianca was blamed for everything that went wrong in the city and called *strega* and *puttana*.[9] That Francesco was not really into governing and rather spent time with his alchemic experiments did not much improve the situation.

When both Bianca and Francesco died unexpectedly and on the same day, 20 October 1587, Francesco's brother Cardinal Ferdinando de' Medici, who succeeded him as grand duke, did everything to remove his late sister-in-law from history. Her heraldry was removed from prominent locations and her

[7] Bonaventuri was banned from the city; Bartolomeo tried to put Bianca in a monastery, but she never gave in to his wishes: see Maria Fubini Leuzzi, 'Straniere a corte. Dagli epistolari di Giovanna d'Austria e Bianca Capello', in: Gabriella Zarri (ed.), *Per lettera. La scrittura epistolare femminile tra archivio e tipografia secoli XV-XVII*, Rome 1999, pp. 413-40, here pp. 431-435.

[8] Musacchio, 'Objects and Identity', pp. 482-483, also for sources on Bianca's impopularity in Florence.

[9] Musacchio, 'Objects and Identity', p. 483; Luciano Berti, *Il Principe del Studiolo: Francesco I dei Medici e la fine del Rinascimento fiorentino*, Pistoia 2002, pp. 48-51.

name and portrait were omitted from Medici self-presentation.[10] In fact, her death and that of her husband raise suspicion: while it has long been believed that they contracted malaria residing in their country villa Poggio a Caiano, recent medical investigations support the old story that Ferdinando poisoned the two with arsenic.[11] When the ambitious cardinal Ferdinando, running for pope during the conclave of 1585, was beaten by Camillo Peretti (Sixtus V), the grand ducal throne must have seemed a fine alternative. The only obstacle for him after Francesco and Bianca passed away was Antonio, at that time only eleven years old, but nevertheless rightful heir to the throne. As several authors have argued, however, Ferdinando successfully created suspicions around Antonio's birth: Bianca, who during the later years of her life indeed had not been able to produce any more offspring, would have faked a pregnancy and obtained a baby from another woman.[12] These rumours at first spread only slowly, but they would later on become the basis of the many novels, plays, and more official histories that have been written about Bianca. All this has determined historiography for a very long time.

A Daughter of Venice

In Venice, on the other hand, the situation was very different: as soon as she married the grand duke, Bianca's fellow countrymen no longer felt a bias towards her, for through her marriage with the grand duke, Bianca obtained a key position in the contacts between the Tuscan and Venetian states. Having fallen out of grace in her homeland when she ran away with her Florentine lover, she was received with open arms again the moment the news of her forthcoming wedding reached the *laguna*. This was in June 1579; immediately all sorts of festivities and ceremonies were organized: the Florentine community held a great banquet in honour of their ambassador, the Venetian

[10] Musacchio, 'Objects and Identity', pp. 484-485. Sometimes 19 October is mentioned as the day of Francesco and Bianca's deaths.

[11] Francesco Mari, Aldo Polettini, Donatella Lippi and Elisabetta Berto, 'Heavy Metals: The Mysterious Death of Francesco I de' Medici and Bianca Cappello: An Arsenic Murder?', *British Medical Journal* 333 (2006), pp. 1299-1301. Not long ago, however, this has been contested by another team, which argues that Francesco I suffered from malaria at the time of his death: see Gino Fornaciari, Valentina Giuffra, Ezio Ferroglio, and Raffaella Bianucci, 'Malaria was "the Killer" of Francesco I de' Medici (1531-1587)', *The American Journal of Medicine* 123 (2010), pp. 568-569.

[12] Musacchio, 'Objects and Identity', p. 485.

nobility arranged regattas, and Bianca's father and brother were invited into the Ducal Palace and knighted by the Doge. Her diplomatic value was thus generously acknowledged by her native city. The most important token of that value was perhaps the title with which Bianca was bestowed: the senate declared her 'true and exceptional daughter of our *Signoria*'.[13]

The political importance of the marriage was recognized by both parties. Venice no less than the Medici court sent its ambassadors back and forth during the months of the engagement and the marriage celebrations. Family members of Bianca visited the grand ducal court, while relatives of Francesco travelled to Venice, and all those visitors, including the official ambassadors, brought lavish gifts with them. Politics kept playing an important role in the rest of Bianca's life as grand duchess. For in her person, Venice and Florence were united. Francesco Sansovino is explicit about this when he, a Florentine by birth and Venetian by choice, calls Bianca 'my Princess in the one and the other state' (*mia Principessa nell'uno et nell'altro stato*).[14] It was mainly for that reason, this dual nature, that certain Venetians, among whom Francesco Bembo, tried to get in touch with her: not coincidentally, Bianca's correspondence with her Venetian friend Francesco Bembo was started around the time of her marriage with Francesco de' Medici.

That Bianca was declared 'daughter of the Republic' was an exceptional statement; the honour was only bestowed before on Caterina Corner (1454-1510), a member of the noble Venetian Corner family who married the last king of Cyprus and ruled the island after his death, but in 1489 had to abdicate under huge pressure of the Venetian state (fig. 73).[15] In return she was given the village of Asolo, where she retreated and established a true Renaissance court, attracted poets and painters, so that the poet Cardinal Pietro Bembo (1470-1547) would later situate his dialogues on love and the courtly life *Gli Asolani* in her little 'kingdom'. Caterina's actions as a patron of the arts were motivated by a desire for self-preservation; her splendid court was a

[13] ' … vera et particolar figliola della Signoria nostra'. Quoted from Cicogna, *Delle inscrizioni*, vol. V, p. 559. The senators were quite unanimous: of the 215 who voted, only nine were against this special title for Bianca (with eleven invalid ballots).

[14] 'Percioche dovendo io riconoscer con qualche segno d'obedienza, et di humiltà l'Altezza vostra, come mia Principessa nell'uno et nell'altro stato…' Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima*, first page of preface.

[15] On Caterina Corner, also with regard to her art patronage, see Francomario Colasanti in: D.B.I., vol. XXII, s.v. 'Caterina Corner (Cornaro), regina di Cipro', pp. 335-342.

way to compensate for the official position that she had lost. Over time, the figure of Caterina Corner came to embody everything praiseworthy in a Venetian noblewoman: chastity, modesty, and self-sacrifice in favour of the common good.

The link between Caterina and Bianca did not go unnoticed by the latter's contemporaries. In *Venetia Città Nobilissima* (1581) Francesco Sansovino wrote that 'they adopted the said Grand Duchess Bianca as daughter of the Republic, in the manner that they adopted already Caterina Cornaro Queen of Cyprus.'[16] In the preface to his book, which was dedicated to Bianca, he even constructed a family bond between the two illustrious ladies: Paolo, one of Bianca's Capello ancestors, was married with Caterina's sister.[17] And the art collector Jacopo Contarini decided to hang his copy of Bianca's portrait next to that of Caterina.[18] It is telling of Bianca's eagerness to establish herself that the initiative to give her this title came from the Florentine court: as she was well aware, honouring her with a title borne before only by Caterina Corner forged an explicit connection between Bianca and this archetype of female Venetian virtue.[19] Both Bianca and the Venetian government recognized the potential inherent in such a construction, which for Bianca must have further legitimized her position and for Venice was a way to enhance contacts with Florence.

[16] I quote the full passage: 'Co[n]ciosia che have[n]do Fra[n]cesco de Medici Gran Duca di Toscana, et pote[n]tissimo Prencipe in Italia, tolto p[er] donna, Bianca figliuola di Bartolomeo Cappello nobilissimo Senatore, comparì a Venetia, per nome dell'una, et dell'altro Principe Mario Sforza, a dar notitia di questo fatto, a Padri. I quali sentendo lo Sforza, che espose l'ambasciata con affettuose parole, si commossero di maniera, che inteneriti nell'interno da una incredibile dolcezza che si sparse per entro a petti loro, versarono lacrime giu de gli occhi. Et indi a poco, ridotti in Senato, crearono Cavaliero Bartolomeo con Vittorio suo figliuolo. Et adottarono per figliuola della Republica, la detta Bianca Gran Duchessa, in quella maniera ch'essi fecero già Caterina Cornaro Regina di Cipri.' Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima*, pp. 285r-v.

[17] '[Vittorio Cappello] della Consorte Quirina d'antica prosapia, ripiena in ogni secolo di titoli principali nella Rep. creò Paolo, che hebbe per moglie la sorella della Regina di Cipro…' Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima*, second page of preface.

[18] This is at least what he planned to do, as Francesco Bembo confided to Bianca: 'Il Contarini ne vuole una copia, et lo metterà à canto al ritratto della Regina di Cipro.' A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5938, c. 843v. For Jacopo Contarini, see also below, pp. 249-250.

[19] 'Il giorno seguente dopo desinare li medesimi senatori andorono a levarlo e condottolo in Collegio espose, che il Granduca suo signore haveva preso per moglie la signora Bianca Cappello e l'haveva voluto notificare con ambasciadore espresso, e poi furono lette lettere del Gran duca, e duchessa in questo proposito molto affettuose mostrando aperto desiderio d'esser dichiarita figliola di questo Stato.' Cicogna, *Delle inscrizioni*, vol. V, p. 559.

Bianca's Patronage in Venice

While Bianca's Florentine art patronage has been studied to some extent, her activities in that area in Venice have hardly received attention. Nevertheless, it is clear from her correspondence that she always remained very much aware of her origins and stayed in touch with her family and other Venetians; what is more, she used the arts to stress her presence in her home country.

An important step in that direction, and also the most conspicuous one, was her purchase of the Palazzo Trevisan on the Rio della Canonica, immediately behind San Marco and the Ducal Palace, for her brother Vittore (fig. 74). She bought the palace from the Trevisan family apparently already in 1577; the palace had been built in the beginning of the sixteenth century, possibly with the collaboration of Bartolomeo Bon, one of the top Venetian architects of his time.[20] With its polychrome marble façade adorned with bas-reliefs and colourful pieces of stone, it is certainly one of the most elegant and sumptuous early sixteenth-century palaces in the city. As such, Bianca's acquisition fits well within general Capello practice to make the family known through façades of monumental buildings. Earlier in the sixteenth century the Capellos had already placed a monument for the admiral Vincenzo Capello on the side façade of Santa Maria Formosa, close to the former Trevisan palace, and in the seventeenth century they would even place monuments for several family members on the church's principal front.[21] Just as the male members of her family, Bianca was clearly well aware of the impact of the façade as the face of a building, especially when it was located in the republic's administrative centre and on some of the main processional routes.[22]

But Bianca was also active on a smaller scale. The best evidence for this is given by the letters that went back and forth between her and her Venetian friend Bembo in the spring and summer of 1587. Writing on 7 March of that

[20] Giulio Lorenzetti, *Venezia e il suo estuario. Guida storico-artistica*, Padua 2002 (original ed. Venice 1926), p. 321.

[21] Martin Gaier, *Facciate sacre a scopo profano: Venezia e la politica dei monumenti dal Quattrocento al Settecento*, Venice 2002, pp. 178-206 (for Vincenzo) and pp. 260-263 (for later family members).

[22] For the link between façade monuments and processional routes, see Gaier, *Facciate sacre a scopo profano*, pp. 5-6. For the façade as face, see Monika Schmitter, 'Odoni's Façade: The House as Portrait in Renaissance Venice', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 66 (2007), pp. 294-315.

year, she asked Bembo whether he would commission two little portraits of Venetian women on her behalf:

> I send to Your Lordship these two little ivory boxes so that it may please you to have them filled with two portraits, one of *signora* Labia, whom I understand to be very lovely and beautiful, the other of one of the most beautiful *gentildonne* that live in Venice, hoping that you will make sure that both of them are made by the best hand, because I want them to adorn my little room, and I have chosen to solve this matter by giving this difficult task to you, for the faith I have in your refined judgment.[23]

In the months that followed, Bembo regularly reported on the proceedings of Bianca's commission. He hired a sculptor, one Battista, to portray *signora* Labia at her home, and started a quest for the most beautiful woman of Venice.[24] When he finally picked a woman from the Marcello family, one Marina, we do not know whether this portrait ever reached Bianca – its production was not yet started at the end of July, and only some months later Bianca died.[25] The portrait of Labia safely reached the grand duchess, however, together with two personal gifts from Bembo: a 'beautiful nude' for the grand duke and a Magdalene painted by Titian for the grand duchess – apart from the portrait of Bianca the two most beautiful things in his collection, as he stressed.[26]

What does this tell us? At least it is clear that Bianca, surrounded with artists of all kinds at the Florentine court, kept an interest in Venetian art dur-

[23] 'Mando à V.S. questo duoi scatoletti d'avorio, perche le piaccia di farci mettere duoi ritratti, in uno quello della Sig.ra Labia, quale intendo esser molto vaga, et bella, nell'altro una delle piu belle gentildonne che sieno à Venetia, procurando che ambi duoi sieno fatti da bonissima man, volendo io adornarne il mio stanzino, et à lei hò preso espediente di dar questa briga per la fede ch'io hò nel suo purgato giuditio.' A.S.V., *Collegio lettere principi* 47, c. 9: letter from Bianca Capello to Francesco Bembo, dated 7 March 1586 (Florentine style). A part of this passage has also been published in Cicogna, *Delle inscrizioni*, vol. V, p. 564.

[24] This is not easy, as he explains, because 'vi sono molte giovanette sì, ma non belle. Stiamo male adesso a belle Donne.' A.S.F., *Mediceo del principato* 5944, c. 6v, letter from Francesco Bembo to Bianca Capello from Venice dated 4 April 1587.

[25] See A.S.F., *Mediceo del principato* 5944, letters from Francesco Bembo to Bianca Capello dated 4 April, 18 April, 16 May, and 27 Juni 1587; and *Mediceo del principato* 5945, letter dated 18 July 1587.

[26] A.S.F., *Mediceo del principato* 5945, c. 125r-v, letter from Francesco Bembo to Bianca Capello from Venice, dated 18 July 1587. For Bianca's letter of thanks, dated 1 August, see A.S.Ve., *Collegio lettere principi* 47, c. 16; it is published in Cicogna, *Delle inscrizioni*, vol. V, p. 565.

ing the whole of her lifetime: she specifically looked for portraits of Venetian women by Venetian artists. This confirms what was already known about her collection in Florence. In the so-called Casino opposite the San Marco complex down the Via Larga, she had a number of rooms which she also furnished with Venetian items, among which portraits of Venetian women; this is at least suggested by an inventory of the Casino made after Antonio's death.[27] But the correspondence with Francesco Bembo also raises questions. Who was this *signora* Labia, and why would Bianca want a portrait of her? Why would Bianca want to have portraits of Venetian beauties in the first place? In any case, Bianca's commission can be seen as a demonstration of masculine behaviour; it is a type of patronage usually reserved for men.[28]

The third example of her patronage in Venice that I would like to discuss here is central to this whole chapter and concerns the portrait of herself she gave to Francesco Bembo. I will later discuss this portrait in detail; let it suffice for now to pay attention to the circumstances of the gift. In the autumn of 1585, when Francesco was on a mission to Rome and twice passed through Florence, Bianca met him in person.[29] Bembo showed himself fond of the grand duchess and no less of her portraits at the court; this apparently made her offer to pay for a copy that Francesco himself would have to order when he arrived in Rome. The portrait Francesco saw seems no longer extant; we do however still have its pendant, a full-length portrait of Francesco I, painted by Scipione Pulzone in that same year, 1585 (fig. 75).[30] It was also Pulzone from whom Francesco Bembo ordered his copy in Rome. In his letters of this period Francesco often speaks about 'the grace I receive from you in having your portrait, painted by such a great painter'; he explains that 'if I cannot see Your Highness, I can at least see your true portrait'.[31] Bembo clearly much appreciated Bianca's gift.

[27] Musacchio, 'Objects and Identity', pp. 491-492.

[28] An exception would be certain 'honest courtesans', of whom we know that they also exchanged images of beautiful women: see Simons, 'Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization', p. 298.

[29] For the political background of Bembo's mission, see below.

[30] For this portrait see Langedijk, *The Portraits of the Medici*, vol. II, cat. no. 42,38, pp. 866-867.

[31] '… et perche non vorei che alcuna cosa mi attraversasse la gratia, che da lei ricevo, in havere il suo ritratto, di mano di sì gran pittore, vengo à dirle, quanto hò in com[m]issione. A fine, che se non posso vedere l'Altezza [vostra], possa almen vedere il suo vero ritratto, che è la prima gratia, che gli hò rich[i]esta al Poggio. V.A. che sà il bisogno, sà anco ciò che hà a fare,

Intriguingly, however, not only he, but also his wife, Cillenia Bembo, was honoured with presents from Bianca. We learn this from two letters that Bianca received from her, again in the autumn of 1585. Cillenia wrote these letters to thank her, but also to express her admiration for all that Bianca had achieved: 'we women should walk around proudly given that one of our sex has been born such a great lady full of all those graces that our lord god can give here on earth.'[32] When it comes to the gifts – there were actually three of them – Cillenia modestly adds that one would have been enough. Besides handkerchiefs and gloves, she was especially delighted with a little cross containing wood of the True Cross. In her letter, she states that Bianca is 'divine' and has penetrated her heart.[33] In a later letter, Bianca's importance for the female sex is stressed again, and she is thanked another time for the cross. Here, Cillenia adds that the piece of the True Cross originally had been a gift of a Pope, and that this makes it even more precious (*dono poi fatto a lei da un pontefece che radopia il dono et la sua grandisima amorevolezza…*).[34]

Cillenia's last observation is in particular revealing, I believe, for it shows us something of the practice of gift-giving and the value attached to it. This is relevant, for all that we have seen of Bianca's Venetian patronage so far was actually one big ritual of giving and receiving. Bianca furthermore used the works of art and architecture she commissioned to enhance her physical presence in Venice; like Broccardo Malchiostro's donor portrait, which we studied in Chapter Two, Bianca Capello's portrait owned by Francesco Bembo may be seen as a part of her body outside the body; with it, Bianca distri-

per il suo s[er].tore.' A.S.F., *Mediceo del principato* 5940, c. 1020v, letter from Francesco Bembo to Bianca Capello from Fiorenzolla, dated 5 November 1585.

[32] '… et noi donne dobiamo molto ben andarsene altiere essendo nata una del nostro seso tanta grandisima sig.ra piena di tute quelle gratie che puo dare il nostro sig.re jddio qua giu in terra…' A.S.F., *Mediceo del principato* 5940, c. 901r, letter from Cillenia Bembo to Bianca Capello from Venice, dated 13 November 1585.

[33] '… il presente molto belo e bastava una sola cosa ma .V.A. ne ha voluto mandar tre li facioleti belisimi eli boni guanti et la Crocetta con il vero legno della santisima Croce che molto mi è carisima et mi stupischo dela gran sua cortesia verso di me che mai mi ha conuciuta, e pur mi ha tanto favorita: ma .V.A. che e divina in tuto ha penetrato il mio cuore…'

[34] '… ma io di continuo pregaro il nostro sig.re jddio che la conservi, et in questo felicisisimo stato, et ancho per causa di noi altre donne, che veramente tute noi et molto piu quelle che ha giudicio, la die tenir sempre ne la memoria…' and 'il gran dono in particular che mi ha fato del santisimo legno dlla croce, dono poi fatto a lei da un pontefece che radopia il dono et la sua grandisima amorevolezza…' A.S.F., *Mediceo del principato* 5940, c. 801r, letter from Cillenia Bembo to Bianca Capello from Venice, dated 'lultimo di novembre' 1585.

buted her personhood across her home country. Given what we know of her fertility problems later in life – they became a real obsession for her – we may even wonder whether her art was not a way to compensate for the child she could not have.

The Portrait

The portrait of Bianca Capello that Francesco Bembo ordered from Scipione Pulzone when he visited the painter in Rome can almost certainly be identified with the painting in the collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, currently on view in Schloss Ambras, Innsbruck (fig. 1, colour plate 4). The provenance of that canvas seems to go as far back as the collection of the Venetian patrician Bartolomeo della Nave, which came on the market at his death, around 1637; in 1659 the painting was in possession of the Austrian archduke Leopold Wilhelm, from where it would eventually reach the Kunsthistorisches Museum.[35] The dimensions of the canvas in Innsbruck, 57 by 47 centimetres, diverge only very slightly from those measured in Della Nave's collection.[36]

The painting is characterized both by its apparent absence of idealization and by its great amount of detail, especially in the execution of hair, clothes and jewels. It only shows the lady's head and bust. We see Bianca in a life-size, three-quarter view, with her head slightly turned towards the viewers, suggesting a hint of movement underlined by the folds on the left side of her neck; meanwhile she is looking us in the eyes. She is wearing a rich blue dress, painted with costly *lapis lazuli*, lavishly embroidered with threads of silver and gold; under the dress is a collar decorated with lace (fig. 76).[37] The

[35] Alexandra Dern, *Scipione Pulzone (ca. 1546-1598)*, Weimar 2003, pp. 60-61; Langedijk, *The Portraits of the Medici*, vol. I, 320-1; Günther Heinz, 'Studien zur Porträtmalerei an den Höfen der Österreichischen Erblande', *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien* 59 (1963), pp. 99-224, here cat. no. 260. On the collection of Bartolomeo della Nave and its dispersion after the collector's death, see Ellis Kirkham Waterhouse, 'Paintings from Venice for seventeenth-century England: some records of a forgotten transaction', *Italian Studies* 7 (1952), pp. 1-23.

[36] Dern, *Scipione Pulzone*, p. 61; see also Waterhouse, 'Paintings from Venice for seventeenth-century England', p. 18.

[37] Regarding the blue pigment, Bembo wrote to Bianca on the painter's behalf: 'Dico circa il Gaetano, il quale mi diede al partir mio la occlusa memoria, che mando à V.A. , però che egli desidera haver quel lapis lazoli, come la vederà.' Letter dated 5 November 1585, as in n. 31, c. 1020v.

grand duchess has furthermore adorned herself with four strings of pearls, pearl earrings and another ornament made of pearls in her reddish hear, which is also decorated with a delicate veil. In her décolletage she carries a red carnation (fig. 77).

One of the qualities of this remarkable portrait is certainly its verisimilitude. It has all the qualities of a trustworthy impression and is rather similar to a number of other portraits known to represent Bianca, as we will see. What is more, we know that her family members considered it as lifelike; as Bianca's brother Vittore remarked in a letter to his sister, '*s'assomiglia assai al vivo*'.[38] Indeed, portraits of Bianca were sometimes taken as documents of what she had looked like in the past. The Venetian ambassadors who attended her wedding with the grand duke reported back to the Senate:

> Because of the increase of her years, which have passed the thirty, and because she has also put on some weight, she has changed compared to what she used to be like five or six years ago (from portraits of those years one sees that she was very beautiful).[39]

It was not uncommon for Italian portraits to be looked at this way: especially in northern Italy, some portraits were specifically meant to remind the viewer of the depicted person's ageing (and, consequently, his or her own).[40] Although none of Bianca's extant portraits contain explicit *memento senescere* imagery, their verisimilitude (especially in Bembo's painting) openly invites comparisons between the portrait and the sitter, between past and present.

One should be cautious, however, to conclude that Pulzone's portrait is 'realistic': after all, it will always remain uncertain what Bianca Capello really looked like, for we do not have the opportunity to compare the portrait to the 'real' Bianca – a fact equally true for most of the sixteenth-century Venetian viewers. We may rather suggest that the portrait is rhetorically convin-

[38] A.S.F., *Mediceo del principato* 5942, c. 44r, letter dated 12 April 1586.

[39] '… se bene per il crescimento degli anni, che passano li trenta, e per aver anco messo più carne, ha fatto qualche mutazione da quello che soleva cinque o sei anni addietro (ché dalli ritratti di quel tempo si vede esser stata bellissima)…' The lines are taken from the so-called *relazione* to the Senate by the ambassadors Giovanni Michiel and Antonio Tiepolo, delivered on 9 November 1579; quoted after *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al senato*, ed. Arnaldo Segarizzi, vol. III, Bari 1916, part 1, pp. 276-277.

[40] On ageing as a theme in Italian renaissance portraiture, see Jodi Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance*, Cambridge 2000, in particular p. 48 and further.

cing as the depiction of a living person. With the dark and heavy brows, the somewhat pronounced and fleshy nose, and the short and plumb neck with its three chins, the portrait hardly qualifies as an idealization (fig. 78). In accordance with his reputation, Scipione Pulzone does not seem to have embellished Bianca much; rather, he has depicted her convincingly as a real and living woman including a number of flaws to achieve a certain effect of reality.[41]

Indeed, Scipione Pulzone was a portraitist known for his accuracy and diligence. The Florentine art critic Raffaello Borghini praised his 'portraits after nature that seem alive'.[42] Giovanni Baglione would later write in his *vita* of the artist: 'He was an excellent painter, particularly in painting the effigies of others, … and he not only surpassed his master, but did not have any equal in his time; and he painted them so lifelike and with such diligence, that all the hairs could be counted, and especially the draperies that he portrayed in those [paintings] seemed more true than their originals, which gave them a wonderful taste.'[43] Pulzone's portrait of Bianca in Francesco Bembo's collection seems to have received a similar evaluation, described by its happy owner as 'made with particular diligence by the brave Gaetano (= Pulzone)'.[44] Neither did its great amount of detail escape the attention of Venetian painters. Tintoretto, one of the Bassano's, Palma il Giovane and Veronese; they all were commissioned to paint one and sometimes several copies of the portrait of Bianca.[45] But, as Bembo wrote in another letter: 'Few, rather none of these painters will make it. Tintoretto has started one, but it turns out to be very

[41] For the 'reality effect', see Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, translated by Richard Howard, Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press 1989, pp. 141-148. For the problem of verisimilitude and idealization in early modern female portraiture, see also Joanna Woodall, 'An Exemplary Consort: Antonis Mor's Portrait of Mary Tudor', *Art History* 14 (1991), pp. 192-224, here pp. 207ff.

[42] 'Ritratti di naturale […] che paion vivi.' Borghini, *Il riposo*, p. 578.

[43] '… fu eccellente pittore, e particolarmente in far l'altrui effigie, così egli a' suoi tempi ritrasse gli altrui aspetti, e non solo passò il Maestro, ma nel suo tempo non hebbe eguale; e si vivi li faceva, e con tal diligenza, che vi si sarieno contati sin tutti i capelli, et in particolare li drappi, che in quelli ritraheva, parevano del loro originale più veri, e davano mirabil gusto.' Giovanni Baglione, *Le vite de' pittori scultori et architetti*, pp. 52-53.

[44] 'Fatto con particolar diligenza del valent.mo Gaetano'. A.S.F., *Mediceo del principato* 5938, c. 707r: letter from Francesco Bembo to Bianca Capello from Venice, dated 8 March 1586.

[45] 'Il Tentoretto ne fà due, ò tre copie; per il sig.r Pio; per la contessa; et per cà Capello. il sig.r Giac.o Cont.ni nè vuole uno, ma di man del Bassano; et sarà fatto anco dal Palma, et da Paulo Ver.se…' A.S.F., *Mediceo del principato* 5942, c. 99v.

dissimilar, for [the original] looks more like a living person than a painted one, and its diligence misleads all.'[46] The Venetian painters with their large and spontaneous brushstrokes were apparently unable to imitate Pulzone's prototype, as Bembo thought. In short, one cannot easily overestimate just how special Pulzone's style was compared to the kind of painting produced in Venice in that time.[47]

Seen as an example of court portraiture, Pulzone's painting becomes less extraordinary. However, compared to the average Habsburg court portrait of the later sixteenth century, among which the painting is hanging nowadays, Pulzone's portrait of Bianca Capello has enormous plasticity, unity and overall artistic quality. Also because of Bianca's eyes, which seem to follow the viewers throughout the room, the portrait's physical presence is undeniable.

The detailedness of Pulzone's painting, recognized as such by the Venetians, makes it very apt to be studied from close by (fig. 79). Its style invites the viewer to come close and see what the painter has been doing, especially since the portrait is relatively small.[48] Giorgio Vasari underlined this idea in his famous analysis of Titian's late style:

> It is true that his way of working in his last pictures is very different from that of his youth. For his first works were finished with a certain delicacy and incredible diligence, and might be viewed from near or far, but the last are worked at one go, with [the paint] sloshed thickly [on the canvas] and in

[46] 'Molti voriano copia; et pochi, anzi nissuno di questi pittori la farà. il Tentoretto l'hà principiato, ma disugualiss.o riesce in fatti. perche questa ha più del vivo, che del dipinto, et la dilig.za che è in essa, smarrisce ogni uno.' A.S.F., *Mediceo del principato* 5942, c. 352v.

[47] What kind of paintings could actually be seen in Venice is another question. Venice had heavy restrictions on the import of painted goods from elsewhere, but this does not necessarily mean that non-Venetian paintings were a rare thing. See Elena Favaro, *L'Arte dei pittori in Venezia e i suoi statuti*, Florence 1975, pp. 74-77; Michel Hochmann, 'Le collezioni veneziane nel Rinascimento: storia e storiografia', in Michel Hochmann, Rosella Lauber and Stefania Mason (eds.), *Il collezionismo d'arte a Venezia. Dalle origini al Cinquecento*, Venice 2008, pp. 3-39, here p. 31. The import restrictions could also work the other way around: when Titian visited the Medici court, Cosimo I declined the painter's offer to paint the duke's portrait, according to Giorgio Vasari, 'forse per non far torto a tanti nobili artefici della sua città e dominio.' This was all the more remarkable, since 'non è stato quasi alcun signore di gran nome, né principe, né gran donna, che non sia stata ritratta da Tiziano, veramente in questa parte eccellentissimo pittore.' Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. VI, pp. 164-165.

[48] That is, when we compare it to the probable size of the official full-length portrait in Florence, from which Bembo's version was derived. The dimensions of its pendant, the portrait of Francesco I, are 119 by 143 centimetres, almost six times as large.

stains, so that they cannot be seen from near, but from a distance they look perfect.[49]

And Titian, Vasari says as well, was certainly not the only Venetian painter to use large brushes. Tintoretto, to name just one other example, was widely known for his quick, spontaneous and nonchalant manner of working, as we have seen in the preceding chapter. Scipione Pulzone, however, aimed at a totally opposite effect: his portraits – and Bianca Capello is definitely not an exception – almost force the viewer to come close, pay attention, and even to grab them with her or his hands. In this way, he manages to establish a very intimate connection between painting and viewer.

Although Pulzone's portrait was thus rather atypical from the Venetians' point of view, throughout his career Pulzone seems to have found inspiration in Venetian art.[50] Not only was he attentive to the use of colour for which the painters of that city were (and still are) famous; he also copied and adapted specific Venetian paintings.[51] An interesting example of one such adaptation is an *Annunciation* nowadays in Naples, Museo di Capodimonte, loosely based on Titian's treatment of the same subject today only known through an engraving of Giovanni Jacopo Caraglio (figs. 80 and 81). According to Federico Zeri the first example of what he has coined 'Zeitlose Kunst', Pulzone's scene is depicted in a sober, harmonious style, far removed from the vibrating swirl of luminous angels painted by Titian. Or, as Zeri described it, 'a radical work of revision, of trimming, of extraction of sacred potential, to the point that the image is translated in terms that oddly remind of certain Tuscan masters of the early Cinquecento.'[52] Pulzone's work seems to stand outside time, both in the sense that the level of detail makes time stand still in the works

[49] 'Ma è ben vero che il modo di fare che tenne in queste ultime è assai differente dal fare suo da giovane: con ciò sia che le prime son condotte con una certa finezza e diligenza incredibile, e da essere vedute da presso e da lontano, e queste ultime, condotte di colpi, tirate via di grosso e con macchie, di maniera che da presso non si possono vedere e di lontano appariscono perfette.' Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. VI, p. 166.

[50] Dern, *Scipione Pulzone*, *passim*.

[51] Federico Zeri, *Pittura e controriforma: L'arte senza tempo di Scipione da Gaeta*, Turin 1957, *passim*; Langillotto Mariotti, 'Cenni su Scipione Pulzone detto Gaetano, ritrattista', *L'Arte* 27 (1924), pp. 27-38 (regarding an alleged portrait by Pulzone of an unidentified nobleman, formerly ascribed to Tintoretto, in the collection of the Musée Condé in Chantilly); Erasmo Vaudo, *Scipione Pulzone da Gaeta, pittore*, Gaeta 1976, p. 21 (regarding a copy of Titian's portrait of Pope Paul III, bareheaded, now in Rome, Galleria Corsini).

[52] Zeri, *Pittura e contrariforma*, p. 73.

themselves and in a meta-historical sense, as Heiko Damm has argued: Pulzone's images, solely confined to a religious function, seem not to partake in the increasing autonomy of art.[53]

While in Chapter Three we have seen that the artist's agency can be an important, even decisive factor in the reception of painted portraits, Pulzone's portrait of Bianca Capello seems to present us with a different situation. In Venice understandably no discourse on the powers of Pulzone's brush was going on; instead, in our most important source for the reception of his work, the letters by Francesco Bembo, we see a constant oscillation between attention for the portrait as a representation forged by the artist Pulzone, and the portrait as a living presence of its prototype, Bianca. One moment the representational character is at the centre of attention, but already in the next sentence it may have disappeared; the portrait is identified with what it represents. In fact, Bembo seems to be very much aware of this dual nature of the portrait himself:

> [The portrait] is praised by all, generally and particularly. It is praised for its two headings (*capi*), that is, that the painting is very beautiful, and the portrayed figure is very beautiful. Those who understand it best are stupefied by the great diligence of Gaetano, as well as by the beauty of Your Highness, and even more stupefied are those who have heard from ten or so people that these days Your Highness is in reality still more beautiful, especially in her eyes, in her cheerfulness, and in her whiteness (*bianchezza*).[54]

The last word, *bianchezza*, is of course a pun on the grand duchess' name: not only is she praised for her fair skin, it is also her personality, her being Bianca as it were, that is admired – but this only as an aside. More interesting is Bembo's choice of the word '*capi*', literally 'heads' or 'headings'. What Bembo is saying here is that a portrait's representational character and its

[53] Heiko Damm, 'Review of: Alexandra Dern, Scipione Pulzone (ca. 1546-1598), Weimar: VDG 2003', *Sehepunkte* 5 (2005), no. 7, URL: http://www.arthistoricum.net/index.php?id=276&ausgabe=2005_07& review_id=6431, last consulted on 13 June 2011.

[54] 'Esso è lodato da tutti [generalm.te], e particolarm.te; lodato per tutti duoi i capi, cioè che la pittura sia bell.ma, et bell.ma la figura ritratta. et le più intendenti hanno stupito della diligenza grande del Gaettano, come della bellezza di V.A., e molto piu quelli, à chi più di dieci fecero fede, che anche hoggidi V.A. è più bella, massime negli occhi, nell'illarità, et in bianchezza.' A.S.F., *Mediceo del principato* 5942, c. 99r, letter from Francesco Bembo to Bianca Capello from Venice, dated 20 April 1586.

overcoming that representational character – the portrait dissolves into what it represents – are two manifestations of the same thing; two sides of one medal.

This dialectic reflects, indeed, a certain dualism that was present in Pulzone's style. Even when one is only centimetres removed from the portrait of Bianca one hardly distinguishes the strokes of the brush, such is the precision and control with which it is painted; in fact, it seems not to be painted at all. But since such a manner was so unusual in Venice at the time, it simultaneously points towards itself, asks attention for itself.

There is a telling anecdote on Pulzone's ideas of authorship which may shed further light on the matter.[55] Giovanni Baglione recounts how one time the master from Gaeta was asked to repair Raphael's *St Luke*, donated to the Roman Accademia di San Luca. And indeed, Pulzone repaired it. But he did not stop there: 'Like he was used to, he inserted down under a feigned piece of paper with his name on it.'[56] When Federico Zuccari, who revered Raphael, saw this, he was inflamed with anger, as Baglione tells, and was indignant at his colleague's presumption. Although this story originates from the seventeenth century, and one should thus be careful applying it to an earlier period, it is intriguing that such an extraordinary act of appropriation is attributed precisely to Scipione Pulzone, the timeless painter with the invisible brush.

So far, we have discussed the portrait's individualized facial features, its paint handling and level of detail. But there is more to it, such as the choice of clothes and jewellery, to which we shall turn now. Their importance for the meaning of this picture becomes the more apparent when they are compared to clothes and jewels in other portraits representing Bianca (for example, fig. 82). The portrait in Bembo's possession belongs to a whole series of portraits that all have the exact same face. The series originates from the time of Bianca's marriage to the grand duke and was seemingly established by Alessandro Allori, court painter of the Medici. For examples, see, besides the image just mentioned, the portrait currently in Bologna, where Bianca wears

[55] For this anecdote and more information on the painting it concerns, see also Dern, *Scipione Pulzone*, pp. 71-72.
[56] '… come era solito nelle sue opere, vi mise una carta finta co'l suo nome di sotto appiccata.' Baglione, *Le vite*, p. 124.

a silverish dress and has a little dog on her lap; or the double portrait with Don Antonio (figs. 83 and 72, respectively). The dresses and part of the jewellery are different each time and remarkable for the meticulous detail with which they are portrayed. This confirms what was already known about Allori's working practice: he regularly borrowed dresses and ornaments from Bianca, with whom he agreed in advance on the costume he would depict, but, as far as we know, did not ask her to pose again for every new portrait.[57] This can be considered, I believe, part of a larger tendency in early modern Italian portraiture, especially court portraiture, to focus more on clothes and ornaments than on the body per se. Sometimes the hands were even painted after those of a studio model.[58] May we assume that the painter and the lady to be portrayed, picked dress and jewels carefully, with a particular purpose in mind?

Judging from examples in Cesare Vecellio's *Of old and modern clothes* (*Degli habiti antichi e moderni*, 1590), Bianca's dress as it is depicted in Pulzone's portrait is in its shape and ornamentation quite similar to those dresses worn by Venetian married noblewomen at public celebrations; compare for instance the large lace collars, the conspicuous décolletages, and the multiple strings of pearls (fig. 84).[59] With her hair symmetrically divided in two more or less vertical shapes, her hair dress is characteristically Venetian too.[60] The pearls and the flower refer to marriage and fertility, themes that were of great importance to Bianca as well. The sumptuousness of her clothes and jewels in general was perceived by contemporaries as more befitting to a Venetian than a Florentine lady: as a Welsh visitor to both cities remarked in 1549, 'The

[57] See Langedijk, *The Portraits of the Medici*, vol. I, p. 126, who cites Allori's diary: Alessandro Allori, *I ricordi di Alessandro Allori*, ed. Igino Supino, Florence 1908, for example p. 24.

[58] Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, Cambridge 2000, p. 34.

[59] Vecellio complemented his illustration with a description: 'In questa nostra età usano le spose non solo habiti superbissimi, ma ancora gran quantità di gioie, di perle, e d'ori. le vesti sono longhe fino in terra con strascino, et con il busto così poco alto di bocca, che quasi si vedono tutte le ma[m]melle. l'acconciatura di testa è vaghissima formata davanti con capelli biondi in guisa di due corna. si cingono con catene d'oro, et usano orecchini di perle, delle quali adornano anco abondantissimamente il collo.' Cesare Vecellio, *Habiti antichi et moderni di tutti il mondo di nuovo accresciuti di molte figure* (Venice, 1598), p. 98r.

[60] See, for example, Evelyn Welch, 'Art on the edge: hair and hands in Renaissance Italy', *Renaissance Studies* 23 (2009), pp. 241-268, who recently argued that, among other items designed for the bodily extremities, accessories for the hair were valued in Renaissance Italy for the ease with which they could be adapted to express political, social and individual meanings.

Florentines' wives are nothing so gay as the Venetians. For they love a modesty in their women's apparel and, specially if she pass the age of forty, lightly she weareth but plain black cloth.'[61] And Francesco Sansovino argued that the Venetians were much more proud than other Italian peoples of their particular clothing styles.[62] As is shown by Vecellio and other costume books, Venetian women of the time could be distinguished in age, marital status, social class and geographical background on the basis of their outfits alone, so widely developed were dress codes of the time. Clothes not only kept a person warm and decent; they had a message to convey; they literally fashioned a person. This is no less true for Pulzone's Venetian portrait of Bianca: every element in Bianca's outfit tells a part of a story; her body is as a mannequin on which she displays her desired position in society.[63] To make this more concrete, she is not just shown as a princess, but specifically as a *Venetian* princess; as daughter of that most Serene Republic. The fertility symbols attest of her role as wife and mother, roles that became such an obsession for her during her marriage with Francesco de' Medici. By sending precisely this portrait to her friend in Venice, she knew it would enhance the reputation and presence of her person over there, and help strengthen the diplomatic alliance with Florence that her person embodied.

[61] Quoted after Elizabeth Currie, 'Clothing and a Florentine style, 1550-1620', *Renaissance Studies* 23 (2009), pp. 33-52, here p. 36. For the cultural meaning of jewellery in particular, see also Marcia Pointon, *Brilliant Effects: A Cultural History of Gem Stones and Jewellery*, New Haven and London 2009, part one.

[62] He even goes so far as to suggest a connection between the Venetians sticking to their traditions and their lasting sovereignty: 'Percioche cominciando da gli habiti indicativi dello humore delle persone, noi vediamo che gran parte de gli Italiani, dimenticatisi di esser nati in Italia, et seguendo le fattioni oltramontane, hanno co pensieri mutato lo habito della persona, volendo parere quando Fra[n]cesi, et Spagnuoli. Et certo con danno et vergogna loro, et con manifesto segno della loro poca stabilità et fermezza, poi che non si è mantenuto mai, da quegli huomini ch'altre volte hanno signoreggiato l'altre nationi del mondo, un perpetuo et saldo tenore nelle cose loro. Sola questa città s'è conservata in generale meno corrotta fra tante, se bene in ogni tempo è stata, et è tuttavia rifugio de i forestieri, i quali sogliono introdurre in casa altrui l'usanze loro. Percioche facendo i Veneti professione, fino dalla prima origine loro, di pacifichi, et religiosi, et d'essere uguali l'uno all'altro, accioche dalla ugualità ne nascesse stabilità et concordia […].' Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima*, pp. 146v-147r.

[63] A similar point is made by Elizabeth Currie on the clothing style of Christine of Lorraine, wife of Ferdinando I de' Medici, who in the first period of her marriage wore, and was portrayed in, French dresses in order to link herself to the French throne and thus underline the diplomatic importance of her marriage with Ferdinando; later her style gradually became more 'Florentine' (see Currie, 'Clothing and a Florentine style', pp. 34-38).

But why, we may wonder, did Bianca send her portrait to this for us rather obscure Francesco Bembo? And, reversely, what was in it for him? In this section, we will look at the portrait from Bembo's point of view.

Like Bianca, Francesco Bembo was a member of an ancient Venetian patrician family, the same family, in fact, that had produced the famous poet Cardinal Pietro Bembo (1470-1547). Francesco, however, would never acquire the same renown as his relative; indeed, his life ended without glory when he was beheaded on the Piazzetta San Marco in 1599.[64] As far as his connection with Bianca is concerned, we know that he corresponded with her from the time of her grand ducal marriage onwards – he seems to have been present at the festivities – and that he twice visited the Florentine court when he travelled with a group of ambassadors to Florence and Rome in the autumn of 1585.[65] Apart from that, he was active as a poet.[66]

Paying some attention to Bembo's literary activities is a necessity at this point. Numerous studies have shown how the viewing of early modern portraiture was conditioned by the poetics of the time; and how poetry, in turn,

[64] Cicogna, *Delle inscrizioni*, vol. V, pp. 563-564, n. 1.

[65] See the many letters from Francesco Bembo to Bianca Capello written in October and November 1585.

[66] For Bembo's genealogy, see Marco Barbaro, *Arbori de' patritii veneti*, I, 331. See c. 325 for Pietro Bembo; the two men belonged to separate branches, both with their origins in the fourteenth century, of one of the oldest families in town. Emmanuele Cicogna argues that Francesco Bembo, son of Gaspare (as in Barbaro, see above), can most likely be identified with Francesco Bembo, the poet. Francesco, son of Gaspare, married in 1564 with a woman named Pollisena Michiel, but remarried in 1574, according to Cicogna, with a daughter of Federico Trissino from Vicenza, who had been a widow. Now, I have found an additional clue that this Francesco Bembo, son of Gaspare, is indeed the same as the poet – and that he is furthermore also the same as our letter writer.

The Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana preserves a manuscript with sixteenth-century poems from various authors, which includes a poem titled *Canzon de Magagnò in tel sposego della segnora Cillinia Dressena in lo segnore Franc[esc]o Bembo al banchetto che i fe in cha Dresseno*. This is to say: a poem written by 'Magagnò', nickname of Giovanni Battista Maganza, a well-known poet and painter from Vicenza, written on the occasion of the wedding of 'Cillinia Dressena', a dialect form of 'Cillenia Trissino', and Francesco Bembo. This not only confirms Bembo's marriage to a daughter of the Trissino family, but also shows that he was well acquainted with the leading poets of his day. What is more, the name of Bembo's wife, Cillenia, re-occurs in the letters written to Bianca Capello, this time not with 'Trissino' but with 'Bembo' behind it, where she writes as the wife of Francesco. See ms. It. IX. 272 (= 6645): *Rime di diversi del secolo XVI*, c. 175v.

was informed by changing practices in portrait painting.[67] In the preceding chapter we have seen how, after the death of Irene di Spilimbergo, the powers of portraiture were examined in poetry. All this is reason enough to take a look at how Bembo's poetical aspirations informed his manner of viewing Bianca's portrait.

Francesco Bembo seems not to have been a particularly prolific poet. Like most of his Venetian colleagues, writing poetry for him was not a full-time occupation; it rather was something that men active in the Republic's administration or in the church liked to do in their spare time. Poetry was truly a social business: it was meant to be performed, meant to be exchanged, and it thus helped to fashion alliances and friendships. And so it was with Francesco Bembo. Besides *The seven penitential sonnets* (*I Sette sonetti penitentiali*; 1596) he published on his own, he contributed to collections of fellow poets, among whom Celio Magno and Battista Guarini (1538-1612).[68] Also to Bianca Capello Bembo wrote poems, about her portrait and other topics, but unfortunately, none of these seem to have survived.[69]

As a writer of letters, on the other hand, Bembo was more productive. The letters that he wrote to Bianca, which came almost weekly (simultaneously with the mail service running between Venice and Florence), certainly have a literary quality – although they were not meant for publication. In any case, here I will look at them from the point of view of literature, only to study them for their political function later on.

While the poems on Bianca's portrait are lost, a few sonnets Bembo exchanged with Celio Magno on the subject of the latter's portrait, which was

[67] Bolzoni, *Poesia e ritratto*; Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture*; Rogers, 'Sonnets on Female Portraits from Renaissance North Italy'.

[68] For the *Sette sonetti*, see Cicogna, *Delle inscrizioni*, vol. V, p. 563. For Battista Guarini, see Jean Paul Barbier-Mueller and Jean Balsamo, *Ma bibliothèque poétique*, vol. VI, *Poètes italiens de la Renaissance dans la bibliothèque de la Fondation Barbier-Mueller: De Dante à Chiabrera*, part 2, Geneva 2007, pp. 422-426; for Bembo and Guarini in particular p. 424.

[69] When he was travelling between Rome and Florence, Bembo wrote Bianca two sonnets, one about her portrait ('vorrei che andasse per tutto il mondo') and one about a certain ring, apparently a gift, which Bembo intriguingly wanted to stay between his addressee and himself ('tra V.A. e me'). In a letter of 17 May 1586, he refers to two sonnets on Bianca's portraits, one of which she already knows; one of his visitors, Federico Badoer, asked to see them. On 16 May 1587 he refers to a sonnet, written almost two years ago by then, which is in press; could this be the first sonnet on the portrait, composed in October 1585?

painted by Domenico Tintoretto, are still extant.[70] Let us look at them to get some idea what Bembo as a poet was like. It is uncertain to what image they actually refer; as Carlo Ridolfi suggested in his *vita* of Tintoretto, it may well have been part of an official group portrait of several secretaries of state.[71] The sonnet series originally consisted of four poems: a first one by Magno to Tintoretto, a second by the painter back to the poet, a third by Bembo to Magno, and the last one a final reply by Magno.[72] That Domenico contributed a sonnet is shown by a letter of his hand; the poem itself has disappeared.[73] Francesco Bembo's contribution is as follows:

> While I contemplate, divine Magno, and look at
> your true and living painted image,
> and together read those worthy songs, wonder-stricken
> is my soul, so much that I can hardly breathe.

[70] That Francesco Bembo's relation with Magno went beyond the strictly professional, is suggested by a remark in one of his letters to Bianca, where he refers to a dinner party at Magno's for which he is invited ('Domani dal S.or Celio Magno à cena, che à lui tocca la volta, V.A. sarà nominata a tutto pasto.' Bembo is clearly promoting the grand duchess on this type of occasion. See A.S.F., *Mediceo del principato* 5938, c. 375r.

[71] 'Ne fece ancora gran quantità di Gentiluomini e Senatori veneziani […] così vivaci e naturali che sembrano vivi. […] i Secretarii del Senato Giovanni Scaramella, Francesco Maravegia, Agostino Dolce, Camillo Ziliolo, Luigi Quirino, e Celio Magno; sopra di che egli così scrisse: Mentre ne' tuoi color si propria miro [etc.].' Carlo Ridolfi, *Le maraviglie dell'arte Ovvero le vite degli illustri pittori veneti e dello stato*, ed. Detlev von Hadeln, vol. II, Berlin 1924, pp. 260-261. Ridolfi's account admittedly is somewhat ambiguous: did Domenico portray the secretaries all together or apart?

[72] Magno's sonnet, 'Mentre ne' tuoi color sì proprio miro', his reply to Bembo's, 'Da te pari al gran merto ornarsi miro', and Bembo's sonnet have been published in a joint publication of poems by Celio Magno and Orsatto Giustiniani (Venice: Andrea Muschio, 1600) and, more recently, in Barbara Mazza Boccazzi, 'Ut pictura poesis: Domenico Tintoretto per Celio Magno', *Venezia Cinquecento* 11 (2001), pp. 167-175. Twice, however, the sonnet of Bembo is headed by the title 'Riposta d'incerto'. We are lucky to be able to attribute this poem now to Francesco Bembo, on the basis of a manuscript in the Marciana Library (ms. It. IX. 172 (= 6093)). This collection of letters and poems sent to Celio Magno contains a sheet including the sonnet 'Mentre Magno divin, contemplo e miro', signed by Francesco Bembo (see c. 142r-v). The accompanying letter is undated but, as the author refers to a certain Cardinal Aldobrandini, 'nepote di Sua Beatitudine', that is, nephew of the pope, we may gather that it was written during the papacy of Clement VIII Aldobrandini (1592-1605). As Bembo died in 1599, we can establish a date for letter and poem between 1592 and 1599. Domenico Tintoretto's letter, which also contained a poem for the series, is dated 22 September 1597, which is consistent with my findings. That Bembo's name was not mentioned in the 1600 edition will probably have to do with the fact that he was executed a year before, and thus *persona non grata*.

[73] See B.N.M., ms It. IX. 172 (= 6093), c. 69r; the letter was later published in Cicogna, *Delle inscrizioni*, vol. V, p. 251, and in Mazza Boccazzi, 'Ut pictura poesis'.

Then it seems to me, when I turn my thoughts to the glory
of whom it exalts, and of who has fashioned him so well,
that the glory of Apelles and of Alexander are extinct;
and that I, when I praise you, aspire to fame.

Thus, the pen and the brush make
the great value of both better known: the high and beautiful works
of Domenico, and Celio, and the honour of Adria.

And so, a new Apollo raises with his song a new Apelles
to the stars: and the painter
shall hear the new Apollo call him the new Apelles.[74]

Bembo's sonnet is not particularly original: I find it interesting for the very conscious way in which it situates itself in a playful rivalry between painters and poets (*et ch'io, mentre voi lodo, a fama aspiro*). Domenico's depiction of Celio surpasses Apelles' portrait of Alexander the Great; but that makes Francesco Bembo, praising both of them, automatically into a greater poet, a new Apollo, a new Homer even (as Magno calls him in a later sonnet).[75] Such hyperboles are perhaps only imaginable at the end of the great tradition that was Petrarchism; they also show how much Bembo was aware of great examples: not only the ancient ones, obviously, but also Petrarch and the other Bembo.

As was mentioned earlier, Francesco Bembo belonged to the same family as the renowned poet Pietro Bembo, active in the first half of the sixteenth century. And as all Venetian patricians, Francesco must have been very much aware of his family ties, especially with so illustrious a kinsman, and with so ambitious a character. Indeed, one of his fellow poets, Battista Guarini, honoured Francesco with a comparison: 'Thus, although our Country is deprived

[74] 'Mentre, Magno divin, contemplo, e miro/ Di te la vera, e viva imagin pinta,/ E leggo insieme i degni carmi; vinta/ L'alma è sì di stupor, ch'a pena io spiro.// Parmi poi; s'a la gloria il pensier giro/ Di chi l'essalta, e chi sì ben l'ha finta;/ Quella d'Apelle, e d'Alessandro estinta:/ Et ch'io, mentre voi lodo, a fama aspiro.// Così d'ambo piu noto il gran valore/ Fan la penna, e 'l pennello: opr'alte, e belle/ Di Domenico, e Celio, e d'Adria honore.// Quinci è, ch'un novo Apollo alzi a le stelle/ Cantando un novo Apelle: et che pittore/ S'oda del novo Apollo il novo Apelle.'

[75] From Celio's second poem in the series ('Da te pari al gran merto ornarsi miro'): 'Che scarse al suo desio negar le stelle/ Nobil Poeta, e dier nobil Pittore;/A me dan novo Homero, e novo Apelle.'

of him / to whom the Greek language gave up honour, and the Latin / by you it is glorified / Bembo close to him, living image (*imagin viva*) of that other Bembo.'[76] In the person of Francesco, the famous Pietro lived on, as Guarini suggests. I will argue that Francesco himself liked to think of it in much the same way, and, in order to follow in the footsteps of this famous relative, very consciously modelled his poetry, as well as his prose, including the way he treated the portrait of Bianca.

But what exactly did he imitate in Pietro Bembo? Pietro Bembo is known for his *Prose on the Vernacular Language* (*Prose della volgar lingua*, 1525), a book in which he proposed the vernacular language of Petrarch as the model for contemporary lyrical poetry; but even more so for *Gli Asolani* (1505), a series of dialogues on love situated at the court of Caterina Corner (see above, p. 209), which bought him a role in Baldassare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*. Pietro Bembo more than any other writer of the Renaissance canonized Petrarchan lyric, and made the longing for an unattainable woman into an ideal, not something humiliating but rather ennobling and worth imitating, as it incites, as was the idea, the unfulfilled Platonic lover to turn inwards, towards an imagined, but more ideal replication of his beloved lady, and ultimately to a higher, spiritual reality.

As has recently been argued, Bembo not only found inspiration in Petrarch for his *literary style*, but also for his life. In the several affairs he had with women (with Maria Savorgnan and Lucrezia Borgia, both when he was in his thirties), he 'saturated his affective life with the literary heritage he so cherished', as Gordon Braden writes.[77] In a not yet fully codified Petrarchism, Bembo and his mistresses found a means to fashion their clandestine affairs.[78]

This also had its impact on the way Bembo and his ladies made use of portrait images. In his two poems on Simone Martini's portrait of Laura, Petrarch claimed he liked the portrait better than the real woman, and this would become a topos in later Petrarchan verse such as Bembo's. As Petrarch famously writes in his sonnet 'Per mirar Policleto a prova fiso', Simone has risen to heaven to portray Laura's soul, freed from her body which normally

[76] 'Così, poichè di lui la Patria è priva,/ Cui cede il Greco onor, cede il Latino,/Di voi ella si gloria, a lui vicino/ Bembo dell'altro Bembo imagin viva.' Quoted after Giovanni della Casa, *Opere*, vol. III, Milan 1806, p. 175.
[77] Braden, 'Applied Petrarchism', p. 404.
[78] See also Braden, *Petrarchan Love and the Continental Renaissance*, especially p. 92 and further.

obscures her immaterial beauty (*qui tra noi, ove le membra fanno a l'alma velo*). With that 'alto concetto' in mind, Simone draws Petrarch's beloved, who now seems to listen when he speaks: 'But when I come to speak with her, benignly enough she seems to listen – oh, if she could only answer to the things I say.'[79] An attentive portrait image was surely very attractive; in a sense much more attractive than the real lady Laura. In his *Secretum sive De contemptu Mundi*, Petrarch has St Augustine dismiss the poet's idolatrous behaviour:

> But what is more insane than that you, not content with the presence of the likeness of that face … have sought to have made another likeness by the skill of a famous artist which you have with you hanging on your person everywhere you go, the theme of permanent and continual tears…[80]

Stubbornly holding on to Laura's image on a little piece of paper, nothing but the most pale reflection of her soul in heaven, Petrarch condemns himself for his inability to fix his attention on higher and more worthy things.

In a passage from the *Life of Giovanni Bellini*, Giorgio Vasari made unambiguously clear just how much for Pietro Bembo portraiture and Petrarchism were related:

> Giovanni thus portrayed for *messer* Pietro Bembo, before he went to stay with pope Leo X, one of his beloved ladies so lively, that it deserved to be celebrated by him, a second Petrarch from Venice, in his rhymes, just as Simone from Siena was celebrated by the first Petrarch from Florence, like in this sonnet: "O imagine mia celeste e pura," where in the beginning of the second *quadernario* he says: "Crede che 'l mio Bellin con la figura;" and that which follows. And what bigger prize could our artists wish for their efforts than being celebrated by the pen of illustrious poets?[81]

[79] 'Ma poi ch'i' vengo a ragionar con lei/ Benignamente assai par che m'ascolte,/ Se risponder savesse a' detti miei.'

[80] 'Quid autem insanius quam, non contentum presenti illius vultus effigie, […] aliam fictam illustris artificis ingenio quesivisse, quam tecum ubique circumferens haberes materiam semper immortalium lacrimarum?' Quoted after Stierle, *Francesco Petrarca*, p. 411. The English translation is from Andrew Martindale, *Simone Martini: Complete Edition*, Oxford 1988, p. 183.

[81] 'Giovanni, dunque, ritrasse a messer Pietro Bembo, prima che andasse a star con papa Leone X, una sua innamorata così vivamente, che meritò esser da lui, siccome fu Simon Sanese dal primo Petrarca fiorentino, da questo secondo viniziano celebrato nelle sue rime, come in

The portrait to which Vasari refers was most likely that of Maria Savorgnan, with whom Bembo had an affair from 1500 to mid-1501.[82] The two lovers both sent many letters to the other: seventy-seven from each side have been preserved.[83] And these letters were accompanied by poems and portraits; the image of Maria referred to above is an example, and was a gift from her to Bembo.[84] He responded in a truly idolatrous, Petrarchan vein: 'I have kissed her a thousand times instead of you, and I pray her for that which I would like to pray for to you…'[85] And in a variation on Petrarch's *Canzoniere* 78, 'Quando giunse a Simon l'alto concetto,' Bembo wrote in his sonnet 'O imagine mia celeste e pura', turning to his beloved portrait, '… your style is less cruel than hers, and you do not throw away my hope, for at least when I look at you, you do not hide.'[86]

At the end of his life, in the 1540s, Pietro Bembo courted Elisabetta Quirini Massola, wife of the Venetian patrician Lorenzo Massola, and celebrated her in letters to Girolamo Quirini and sent her poems. He may also have been in the possession of a portrait of hers by Titian, a number of which circulated through Venice. Giovanni della Casa, the papal *nunzio*, seems to have had one, and the collector and patrician Gabriele Vendramin as well.[87] At that time, it had become common for educated, upper-class men,

quel sonetto: "O imagine mia celeste e pura," dove nel principio del secondo quadernario dice: "Credo che 'l mio Bellin con la figura;" e quello che seguita. E che maggior premio possono gli artefic i nostri disiderare delle lor fatiche, che essere dalla penne de' poeti illustri celebrati?' Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. III, p. 439.

[82] Maria Savorgnan was the widow of Giacomo Savorgnan, whose cousin Antonio would play a pivotal role in the vendettas in the Friuli in 1511. Maria was the mother of the woman who came to inspire Luigi da Porto's *Giuletta e Romeo*, set against the background of these vendettas, the literary work which in turn would inspire Shakespeare. Pietro Bembo, Da Porto's mentor, received a copy: see Braden, 'Applied Petrarchism', p. 421, and Muir, *Mad Blood Stirring*, pp. 158-159.

[83] See Maria Savorgnan and Pietro Bembo, *Carteggio d'amore (1500-1501)*, ed. Carlo Dionisotti, Florence 1950.

[84] Bolzoni, *Poesia e ritratto*, pp. 85-88.

[85] 'Holla basciata mille volte in vece di voi, e priegola di quello, che io voi volentieri pregherei…' Quoted after Bolzoni, *Poesia e ritratto*, p. 24. For the complete letter, see Savorgnan and Bembo, *Carteggio d'amore*, p. 52.

[86] 'In questo hai tu di lei men fero stile,/ Né spargi sì le mie speranze al vento,/ Ch'almen, quand'io ti cerco, non t'ascondi.'

[87] For the portrait in general, and a version of it being in the collection of Della Casa, see Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian*, vol. II, cat. no. L-26, p. 204. Della Casa wrote two sonnets on the image, 'Ben veggo io, Tiziano, in forme nove,' and 'Son queste, Amor, le vaghe trecce bionde'; they are also mentioned by Vasari right after the passage on Bembo quoted above (see Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. III, p. 439). For Vendramin's version, probably covered with a depiction of

time, it had become common for educated, upper-class men, connoisseurs of beautiful art and female beauty alike, to possess portraits of female beauties not their wives, and celebrate them in Petrarchan verse.[88] Indeed, such images were exchanged and collected all over Europe, and considered tokens of value and taste. While easily clashing with today's moral boundaries, in the Renaissance it was more honourable than offensive if one's wife was celebrated in this way by other men; in fact, celebrating female beauty can be considered a strategy for male bonding, and for conscious display of men's power, aesthetics and cosmopolitism.[89] What is more, such images, while taking a specific, historical woman as a starting point, would, in theory at least, lead the male viewer to contemplation of a more abstract, universal beauty, and thus away from the particular attraction of the wife of *messer* so and so.[90] Thus it is explained, to name the most relevant example, by the character of Pietro Bembo himself in Baldassare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, to which the actual Bembo consented before it was published.[91]

As Una Roman D'Elia argues, for Bembo as for contemporary writers, the project of the new *volgare* poetics had been connected to amorous concerns from the beginning.[92] She quotes Niccolò Liburnio, another sixteenth-century Venetian writer, who composed a treatise on the vernacular language even before Bembo did: according to Liburnio, graceful language 'renders the hearts of ladies most tender to the sweet prayers of supplicating lovers.'[93] Pet-

the *Triumph of Love*, recently attributed to Titian (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum), see Catherine Whistler, 'Titian's 'Triumph of Love'', *The Burlington Magazine* 151 (2009), pp. 536-541.

[88] For another Bembo singing the praises of a beloved lady and her portrait (Pietro's father Bernardo on Ginevra de' Benci and her portrait by Leonardo da Vinci), see Fletcher, 'Bernardo Bembo and Leonardo's Portrait'.

[89] See Simons, 'Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization', in particular p. 285 and p. 288.

[90] This is what Patricia Simons calls 'anonymous referentiality' (Simons, 'Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization', pp. 290-291).

[91] See Braden, 'Applied Petrarchism', pp. 398-399.

[92] Una Roman D'Elia, 'Niccolò Liburnio on the Boundaries of Portraiture in the Early Cinquecento', *The Sixteenth-Century Journal* 37 (2006), pp. 323-350, here p. 335.

[93] 'Le caute et in leggiadrezza amorose donne del resto d'Italia tosto che odono, over leggono prosa ò verso con limati et gratiosi vocaboli thoschi mescolato, pieghevoli et mansueti rendono gli lor tenerissimi cuori alle dolci preghiere de sopplicanti amatori.' Niccolò Liburnio, *Le tre fontane in tre libbri divise, sopra la grammatica, et eloquenza di Dante, Petrarcha, et Boccaccio* (Venice, 1526), p. 2r (English translation quoted after D'Elia, 'Niccolò Liburnio on the Boundaries of Portraiture', p. 335). Liburnio's first treatise on the volgare was *Le vulgari elegantie* (Venice, 1521).

rarch's lyric in the *volgare* was turned into a model for affairs of language as well as love.[94]

As I have suggested, Francesco Bembo was very well aware of the great tradition of *Petrarchismo-Bembismo* that he stood in. And I believe that, just as Pietro (and Pietro's father Bernardo) had done, possibly even through Pietro's poems and other writings, Francesco Bembo took Petrarch as a model with which to give shape and meaning to his own relation with an inaccessible lady. Almost every week Bembo sat down in his study (*mezzado*) and wrote Bianca, his absent, beloved Laura, a letter of two or three pages long. Often her absence is specifically thematized, as in this letter written after he had just departed from the Florentine court, 13 October 1585:

> Every time I depart from Your Serene Highness – and it has happened to me twice now – I have the fate of a shower of rain, which accompanies me all through the day, and I believe that it originates from the contempt Jupiter feels for me because I depart from such a great Lady; or perhaps because he is jealous since I am loved and favoured so much by her.[95]

Bembo and his friends, he writes, use the portrait to channel their desire created by her ever longer absence from her native city; on a dinner party at his house, he noted:

> … talking about you, it seemed to me as if I could see you and hear you, being present here; the same happened to my wife […] Your Highness was brought to the table with our desire and our imagination, and everyone made you a toast, and even did we speak with you, with much gentleness, as if you had truly been there. But when everyone became aware of their mistake and their loss, we tried to correct it, and to partially undo it, by beholding, and again beholding your most beautiful painted image, which seems to speak, and which welcomes anyone who looks at it.[96]

[94] See also Acquaro Graziosi, *Giordio Gradenigo*, p. 16 and further.

[95] 'Ogni volta ch'io parto da .V.A.S., et pur mi è successo due fiate, io hò una fortuna di pioggia, che m'accompagna per tutto quel giorno, et credo che q[ue]sto nasca dallo sdegno, che Giove hà meco, perche io mi parte da si gran Donna; ò pur perche egli m'invidia, ch'io sia da lei tanto amato, e favorito.' A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5940, c. 705r.

[96] '… ragionando di lei, mi pareva vederla, et udirla qui p[rese]nte; il med.mo è intervenuto à mia moglie […]; et V.A. fu portata à tavola con il desiderio, et con l'imaginatione; et ogni uno

The imagined presence of the grand duchess is substituted with a real presence of her image – but both are dependent on her actual absence.

We should be careful not to consider the portrait simply as a surrogate, however. The end of the passage suggests that there are limits to the analogy between Bianca and her portrait. Would the real grand duchess tolerate the gazes that scrutinize her features without restraint, let alone invite them? Pietro Aretino wrote to the recently widowed emperor Charles V, about Titian's portrait of his beloved, that anyone who looks at her eyes will soon avert one's gaze, warned by the signals of her modesty inherent in the image (fig. 85); during her life the empress Isabella would never look at anyone who was aware of being watched, Aretino adds as a sign of her virtuous and chaste comportment.[97] To be sure, both Bianca and her image are less modest and 'saintly' than Aretino's example, but that makes my question no less legitimate. Would the grand duchess, for that matter, allow Francesco's wife Cillenia to kiss her, as she kissed the portrait?[98] In this period, such manners rather befitted a very specific and publicly accessible class of women to which Bianca clearly did not belong – despite of what was whispered about her in the Florentine streets.[99] Her painted portrait, like that of Laura, Maria, Elisabetta, and so on, did have certain characteristics that, under specific circumstances, gave it certain advantages over 'the real thing'. The painting came to possess an agency of its own.

le fece [brindisi]; et non meno ragionavamo con lei, e con molta dolcezza; come s'ella vi fosse ver.te stata. Ma poi che del suo errore ogni uno si accorse, e del suo danno; cercassimo di emendarlo, et di rifarsi in parte, con mirare, e rimirare la sua bellissima imagine dipinta; la quale par, che parli, et faccia accoglienza à chi la mira.' A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato*, 5943, cc. 771-2.

[97] 'Le luci, che mai in tanto non aprì, o girò, che si potessero dire aperte, o girate, hanno in sé virtú tali, che chi le rimira assai o poco inchina giuso le sue quasi ammonite dal cenno de la modestia, per causa de la quale la santa giovane non guardò mai persona che si accorgesse d'essere guardata da lei.' Aretino, *Lettere*, vol. III, no. 102, pp. 121-122, here p. 121; the letter is dated October 1544. See also Édouard Pommier, *Théories du portrait: de la Renaissance aux Lumières*, Paris 1998, p. 100; for the portrait see Wethey, *The Paintings of Titian*, vol. II, cat. no. L-20, pp. 200-201.

[98] '… et mia moglie si grettò per basciarlo, quando la tenni per tema, che non le facesse qualche nocume[n]to …' A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5938, c. 707v. And see also a letter about Bembo's visit to the Capello family: 'La portai à Cà Capello la sett.na passata, e vi steti un pezzo; fu veduto volentieri da tutti, et fu dalla giovane basciato…' *Mediceo del Principato* 5942, c. 99v.

[99] On Bianca being called a whore (*puttana*), see Musacchio, 'Objects and Identity', p. 483.

Bembo was clearly aware of this and, as we have also seen above, usually made a conscious distinction between his painting as a representation and the one who was represented: 'Now that the copy is so much longed for, imagine, Your Highness, how much the authentic and true is desired; and may it please God that Venice can see her personally soon.'[100] On the day he finally received his long-desired picture, he wrote about 'the incomparable joy that I feel when seeing it, which suggests that I see Your Highness herself, and that she talks to me. Certainly, it is beautiful, but, certainly, Your Highness is even more beautiful.'[101] One of the most intimate views we get of his way of seeing the portrait is this:

> I always keep this portrait in front of me, here where I sit and where I write. So that, while I am home, I always look at it. Yet it will never satisfy me; and that is very true. Thus, the more I look at it, the more my desire grows to look at it again, because it seems to me that I see Your Highness, though in fact you are more beautiful, and more *bianca*.[102]

From the happy day that the mail servant brought him this portrait, all his letters, according to Bembo, were written with the portrait of Bianca in front of him – keeping one eye on the sheet of paper lying on his desk, the other one staring into the heavenly *lumi* of the lady he was courting.

Bianca Capello for her part contributed to Francesco's Petrarchan script, but to what extent precisely is much more difficult to establish than in the case of, say, Pietro Bembo's mistress Savorgnan. Of the latter we have seventy-seven letters left, which betray a considerable literary talent; of Bianca's letters to Francesco only sixteen are known, and they are all warm, yet quite restrained in tone, certainly free of any literary aspiration. Yet, Francesco's side of the correspondence can also provide us with insights into Bianca's

[100] 'Hora se la copia è tanto desiderata, pensi V.A. quanto sia bramato l'autentico, et vero; et piaccia à Dio, che Venetia possa vederla presto personalm.te.' A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5938, c. 174v.

[101] '… la imparag.le allegrezza ch'io sento vedendolo, che mi par veder l'Altezza [Vostra] propria, e che mi parli. Certo, che è bello; ma certo che V.A. è piu bella.' A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5938, c. 707v.

[102] '…io tengo esso ritratto qui sempre innanzi, dove siedo, et dove scrivo. si che mentre sto in casa, lo guardo sempre; nè però mai mi satio; et è verissimo. Anzi quanto più lo miro, maggior cresce il desidero di rimirarlo, perche parmi di veder V.A., ancora che ella sia in fatti piu bella, e piu bianca.' A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5938, c. 690r.

Petrarchan attitude. First of all, she gave him the portrait, thus not only providing him with a precious object, but also with the opportunity to think himself another Petrarch, another Bembo, endlessly dwelling upon the image of his beloved Laura, his beloved Maria. Secondly, she graciously enacted the role of the unwilling and inaccessible, and thus purely Platonic beloved, also in that way providing Francesco with infinite poetic inspiration. For often do we hear Francesco complain about the sparseness of her replies, and about the fact that she would not visit Venice in person:

> Not to see Your Highness – indeed, it has been almost two years since we last met – and not to have as many of your letters as would be possible: that is dying twice. And if only dying once will take one's life, what is one to believe that dying twice can do? O, I am the Grand Duchess, and you are (*tù sei*) Bembo…[103]

That Bianca died only five months after these desperate lines were written, was, no matter how cruel, the only suitable thing to happen in the end – from a Petrarchan point of view at least; but unfortunately we have no documents from Bembo after her death that would show us how he felt.

Bembo's letters also contain passages that do not so easily fit within a Petrarchan, or in any other fixed scheme. A number of these can be found in his correspondence related to his two visits to the Florentine court in 1585. Again, it is unfortunate that there is no trace of Bianca's part of the correspondence here, but Bembo's letters suggest that for once, their roles had been reversed. Bianca became the supplicating lover, yearning for a sign of affection from her distant friend, while Bembo remained cool and detached: 'the task does not allow for delay,' as he defended his haste to get away from Florence and proceed to Rome. And anticipating their next meeting, when Bembo and his fellow ambassadors would again pass the Medici court on their way back to Venice, he wrote: 'I beg you not to caress me so much, as it pleases you to do out of your immense kind-heartedness, in the company

[103] 'Non veder V.A., et di già siamo vicini alli due anni; et non haver q[ua]nto è possibile sue lettere; è doppia morte. et se una sola, leva di vita, che si può credere, che facciano due? Ò, io son la Gran Duchessa, e tù sei il Bembo…' A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato*, 5944, c. 248r.

of those noblemen…'[104] Such remarks come as a surprise given the normal tone of Bembo's writings.

And what to think of the expressions of affection towards Bianca coming from Bembo's wife? 'Having seen your most beautiful portrait,' Cillenia wrote, 'and that divine candle, I have fallen in love so deeply that I am forced to admire it every hour.'[105] And indeed, she tried to kiss it, only prevented from that by her husband. Is this Mrs Bembo forced into a masculine scheme (consciously, by that same husband, or simply because it was the only manner she knew)? Or is this a sincerely female voice, an expression of Cillenia's appreciation of this outstanding exemplar of her own sex? In the light of some of Cillenia's other writings, part of which I have discussed above, in which she refers to Bianca as 'one of our sex … such a great lady full of all those graces that our lord god can give here on earth', the latter option seems the most likely for now. Other times Cillenia called her 'truly my *patrona*', a nomenclature normally reserved for female patron saints – in that sense it typifies Cillenia's language, dense with religious vocabulary, pretty well.

Bembo's Frame

So far, we have mostly discussed Bianca's portrait from Francesco Bembo's personal view only, and the way he applied it in his re-enactment of his romantic relationship with the portrayed lady. While this may suggest that Bembo kept the portrait all for himself, the opposite is actually true. In the months following his acquisition of the precious image, it came to play an ever more public role. This role was, I believe, nowhere more overtly dis-

[104] '… oltra di ciò la prego à non mi far tante carezze, come si compiace per sua grand.ma benignità di farmi, in presenza di q[ue]sti nobili…' *Mediceo del Principato* 5940, cc. 629r-v.

[105] 'Havendo veduto il suo belisimo ritrato et quella ciera divina io ne son inamarata talmente che son sforciata mirarla ogni hora.' The 'ciera divina', literally 'divine wax', may have been another gift from Bianca to Cillenia. Perhaps what is meant here is a so-called *agnus dei*, a disc of wax which originated from the papal Easter candle and was supposed to have a benificent effect on pregnant women. See John Cherry, 'Healing through Faith: The Continuation of Medieval Attitudes to Jewellery into the Renaissance', *Renaissance Studies* 15 (2001), pp. 154-171, here p. 157; also Luke Syson and Dora Thornton, *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy*, London 2001, pp. 61-63.

played than in the portrait's frame: the picture frame came to embody Francesco's public ownership of Bianca's image.[106]

Although the original frame has not been preserved, we can form a rather precise idea of what it must have looked like, thanks to one of Bembo's elaborate letters. As he firmly stated, the frame's design was all his own (of which he was clearly very proud). It was made of ebony and was of the so-called *cassetta* or box type.[107] The frame's material was rather rare because it was very expensive, owing to the cost of the veneer, and usually only applied for precious paintings of small size – just the type of Bembo's portrait.[108] Apart from ebony, Bembo chose more special materials to adorn the painting with, for he decorated the frame with a variety of semiprecious stones (for an idea of what such a frame may have looked like, see fig. 86). There were pieces of jasper, of agate, carnelian, and lapis lazuli, as well as rock crystal, some of them finished with gold leaf and cut in several different forms.[109] As if the ebony and stones were not enough, Bembo decided to have the frame adorned with four painted little figures, which were meant to be personifications of four of Bianca's many supposed virtues: Innocence, Prudence, Constancy, and Mercy. In early modern Italy, it was not uncommon to adorn a

[106] For a historiography of frames, see Nicholas Penny, 'The Study and Imitation of Old Picture-Frames', *The Burlington Magazine* 140 (1998), pp. 375-382.

[107] In sixteenth-century Italy a great variety of frame types circulated, but the *cassetta* type was certainly one of the most popular ones. It is a type which is the same on all four sides and which always consists of an inner and outer moulding, together with a flat area in between. For a typology of Italian frames, in particular the Venetian school, see Paul Mitchell, 'Italian Picture Frames 1500-1825: A Brief Survey', *Furniture History* 20 (1984), pp. 18-27. For the *cassetta* type especially see Timothy Newbery, 'Picture Framing I: European "Cassetta" Frames from the 15th to the 19th Century', *Museum Management and Curatorship* 14 (1995), pp. 103-107. Exhibition catalogues on (Italian) picture frames, with lots of illustrations, include Pieter van Thiel and Cornelis de Bruyn Kops, *Framing in the Golden Age: Picture and Frame in 17th-century Holland*, translated by Andrew MacCormick, Zwolle 1995; Franco Sabatelli, Enrico Colle and Patrizia Zambrano (eds.), *La cornice italiana dal Rinascimento al Neoclassicismo*, Milan 1992; Timothy Newbery, George Bisacca, and Laurence B. Kanter, *Italian Renaissance Frames*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art 1990; also, exclusively with regard to portrait frames, Paul Mitchell and Lynn Roberts, *Frameworks: Form, Function & Ornament in European Portrait Frames*, London 1996.

[108] On ebony as material for picture frames, see Jacob Simon, *The Art of the Picture Frame: Artists, Patrons and the Framing of Portraits in Britain*, Londen 1996, p. 50; mostly for ebony in the northern European context Mitchell and Roberts, *Frameworks*, p. 90 and further.

[109] As some of these stones tend to vary in colour, we are not certain what the ensemble looked like. Lapis lazuli is blue; carnelian is red and crystal is transparent. Jasper, however, may be yellow, brown, red or green; agate is marbled and varies from red to brown to purple to white to even green.

frame with human figures, either sculpted or painted. Neither was this frame the only one to be decorated with semiprecious stones. Yet, the combination of the two was very special indeed; I have not found any sixteenth-century parallels.[110] Thus, we can safely characterize Bembo's frame as a *patron's frame*, remarkable for its richness and idiosyncratic design, and often related to the work of art within.[111]

It is precisely the picture frame that may offer us further insight into Bembo's manner of appropriating his portrait of Bianca. Let us first examine his remarks on the frame before it actually came into existence; for when Francesco received the portrait, it was still frameless. Having admired the painting for more than two hours, as he wrote, he took the portrait upstairs to show it to the women of his house – his wife Cillenia, and probably also some servants. This is the first time we hear something about framing: 'The Women, though aware that its room should be my *mezado*,' that is, Francesco's private study, 'want to keep it upstairs until the frame is made.'[112] As we learn from his later letters, Francesco thought it best that the portrait would not leave his house until it was framed. Significantly, the only exceptions he made were for art connoisseur and friend Jacopo Contarini – who, moreover, was ill at the time and could not come to Francesco's house – and for the Capello family, that is, the family of the portrayed lady.[113] In the weeks following the portrait's arrival, many people came by to admire Bembo's new possession, but he was not fully comfortable with that. 'Yesterday, when I came back from a consultation on the frame, several noble ladies

[110] The only example I know of besides Bembo's frame is a so-called engaged frame surrounding a late fourteenth-century Sienese *Madonna and Child*; see Newbery, Bisacca, and Kanter, *Italian Renaissance Frames*, cat. no. 3, pp. 34-35.

[111] For the term 'patron's frame', see Simon, *The Art of the Picture Frame*, p. 113.

[112] 'Le Donne che sanno che la sua stanza hà da essere il mio mezado, lo vogliono di sopra fin che se le faccia il fornimento.' A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5938, c. 707v.

[113] That these visits actually took place and are not only products of Bembo's undoubtedly lively imagination is confirmed by the fact that other contacts of Bianca Capello also mention the portrait in their letters to her, exactly matching the dates given by Bembo. For example, when Bembo wrote on 20 April he had taken the painting to the Capello family 'last week', there is a letter from Vittore Capello, Bianca's brother, dated 12 April, that confirms the former message: 'Il Bembo portò qui un ritratto di V.A. di man di Scipione molto diligente et fornito […].' A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5942, c. 44r. There are more letters that confirm Bembo's account: see those written by Cillenia Bembo, *Mediceo del Principato* 5938, c. 661r; another one by Vittore Capello, *Mediceo del Principato* 5942, cc. 139r-v; and by Mazzino Ebreo, *Mediceo del Principato* 5942, cc. 663r-v.

that were here to visit *signora* Bembo, asked more than one time whether I had the portrait here. I hold it in high esteem, but until it is framed, I will not show it any more.'[114] Yet, his attitude was highly ambivalent, for at the same time Bembo could not resist the temptation to show off with this new painting, in Contarini's words 'the most beautiful painting there is in Venice of the moderns'.[115] He let so many people into his house, that when the frame was finally finished, the only person as it were who had not yet seen Bianca's portrait was no-one less than the Venetian Doge.[116] To summarize, it seems that Francesco felt he behaved improperly when showing Bianca's countenance without a frame, except when his own women were concerned. When it came to the Doge, showing the frameless portrait was simply out of the question. It perhaps seems unnatural that a frame should make such a difference. Why was it so important to Bembo?

To start with, it may be interesting to pay some attention to his choice of words here. In his letters he made use of two words which function as synonyms: *fornimento* and *ornamento*. This is not unusual: in Vasari's *Lives*, to cite one example, these two words are interchangeable as well; both signify 'picture frame'.[117] More relevant in this context are other meanings attached to *fornimento* in early modern Italy.[118] Besides to a frame around a painting, the term could denote 'finish' or 'completion'. This may offer us some insight

[114] 'Hieri ritornai à consulto per il fornim.to et alcune gentil.ne che eran ivi à visita di s.s. cl.ma dimandarono piu volte s'io haveva là il ritratto. il quale tengo in gran riputatione: ma finche non sia fornito, non lo mostrerò piu.' *Mediceo del Principato* 5938, c. 690v.

[115] 'Dissemi il Sig.r Iac.o, Franc.o tu hai il piu bel quadro, che sia à Venetia de moderni.' *Mediceo del Principato* 5938, c. 690r.

[116] This makes sense to the extent that the Doge was not allowed to leave the Palace by himself and as a rule never visited private persons. In accordance with sixteenth-century etiquette, people came to him: the person with the lower rank was the one who took the initiative and approached her superior.

[117] See, for example, Vasari's biography of Baccio d'Agnolo, where he discusses picture frames made by Baccio's son Giuliano, some of which were destined for altarpieces by Vasari himself: 'Fece Giuliano un lettuccio di noce per Filippo Strozzi, che è oggi a Città di Castello in casa degl'eredi del signor Alessandro Vitelli, et *un molto ricco e bel fornimento a una tavola* che fece Giorgio Vasari all'altare maggiore della Badia di Camaldoli in Casentino, col disegno di detto Giorgio; e nella chiesa di Santo Agostino del Monte Sansavino fece *un altro ornamento intagliato per una tavola grande* che fece il detto Giorgio. In Ravenna, nella Badia di Classi de' monaci di Camaldoli fece il medesimo Giuliano, pure *a un'altra tavola di mano del Vasari, un altro bell'ornamento*; et ai monaci della Badia di Santa Fiore in Arezzo fece nel refettorio *il fornimento delle pitture* che vi sono di mano di detto Giorgio aretino.' Vasari, *Le vite*, vol. IV, p. 617 (italics are mine).

[118] See *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, vol. VI, s.v. 'fornimento', p. 198.

into the role of Francesco's picture frame: the frame is the picture's completion. Without a frame, the portrait is not really finished and thus cannot be shown to the Doge yet. In the third place, *fornimento* referred to the furnishing and decoration of a room, or to fashion and clothes; a more specific sense of 'completion', in fact. I believe that this third sense alludes to Francesco's picture frame as well: he was not taking the painting outside without a frame, because it was, in a sense, naked. As I will suggest, the frame was to the painting as the dress was to the lady.

There are some interesting parallels with the way religious cult images were framed. When it came to simple cult statues of the Madonna, for example – and much of this is still valid today – they would only be dressed by pious women, as it was believed that men were not allowed to see the Madonna undressed.[119] Valuable icons, such as the *Nikopeia* kept in the church of San Marco, were often enshrined in gold and jewels and 'all but covered by their treasures', as Rona Goffen has it, just like relics in their reliquaries.[120] If indeed Bianca's portrait has some icon-like qualities – the painted silver and gold embroidered dress and many jewels already being some sort of enshrining for the grand duchess' body – then its precious frame, with its material value far outdoing that of the canvas itself, can easily be considered as some sort of reliquary shrine (for a provisional reconstruction, see fig. 87). In Venetian households, frames were equally an indispensable part of devotional images. Often containing a candle holder and a bucket for holy water, these frames together with the images they protected nearly were self-contained oratories (fig. 88). The frames also referred to the (Marian) images inside them with painted symbols or inscriptions, such as prayers.[121] Thus, they helped to determine how devotional images were approached and used, and served as a votive gift to the depicted deity.

Indeed, several heretofore unquoted passages in Bembo's letters to Bianca suggest that he was well aware that frames, in the broadest sense of the word,

[119] For the situation in the Venetian laguna, see Elisabetta Silvestrini, 'Abiti simulacri. Itinerario attraverso mitologie, narrazioni e riti', in: Riccarda Pagnozzato (ed.), *Donne Madonne Dee: Abito sacro e riti di vestizione, gioiello votivo, "vestitrici": un itinerario antropologico in area lagunare veneta*, Padua 2003, pp. 15-66.

[120] Goffen, 'Icon and Vision', p. 509.

[121] For frames in the context of the Venetian household, see Ronda Kasl, 'Holy Households: Art and Devotion in Renaissance Venice', in: id. (ed.), *Giovanni Bellini and the Art of Devotion*, Indianapolis 2004, pp. 59-89, here pp. 66-70.

were much more than just some physical protection to an otherwise vulnerable artefact. When he revealed the portrait to his wife and the maids, for example, he first covered it with a cloth, only to lift it up when he had their full attention, thus turning it into a theatrical showpiece, as we have seen. The cloth not in the first place served as protection; it rather enhanced the aura of the thing it enshrined, and made its viewing into a spectacle. When he finally brought the portrait to show it to the Doge, he had put it in a little box, 'for more security' as he wrote, but again used this protective cover to theatricalize the painting's viewing: 'Monday at two I brought it to the Prince, and the cover of the box being removed, His Serenity felt such satisfaction and marvel, that he kept it in front of him until half past three, and that, when he went to table, he was still praising the very beautiful painting, as well as Your Highness, who is the person represented.'[122] Venetian paintings, especially those of devotional subjects and beautiful women, were often covered, as, for example, Pietro Aretino informs us.[123] In a letter to Diego Hurtado de Mendoza (1505-1575), Spanish writer and ambassador to Charles V, he wrote about an image of a beautiful lady in that nobleman's collection 'of which you only show the curtain of silk, that covers it in the guise of a relic'.[124] As Petrarch wrote, 'the truth uncovered is all the more pleasant the more difficult its quest has been'; but there is also another side to the covering of female images: as the portrait can substitute for the lady, its visual access needs to be controlled, just like Venetian women would conceal themselves from public view.[125] This is of course also what was at stake with the frame.

[122] 'Lo portai dunque lunidi dal Principe alle quattordici hore, e tolto via il coperto della cassetta, rimase s. ser.ta con tanta satisf.ne, et maraviglia, che se lo fece tener derimpetto [fin] alle quindici e meza, che si andò a tavola, lodando semp. la bellissma pittura, et [V.]A. che è la rapp[rese]ntata…' A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5942, c. 649r.

[123] On covering paintings with curtains, see also Victor I. Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, translated by Anne-Marie Glasheen, Cambridge 1997, pp. 60-61.

[124] '…il ritratto del quale mostrate solamente lo invoglio di seta, che lo ricopre a guisa di reliquia.' Letter dated 15 August 1542: see Aretino, *Lettere*, vol. II, no. 441, pp. 433-434, here p. 433.

[125] Quoted after Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture*, pp. 24-25, who has a very informative section on portraits and their covers (p. 22 and further). For the analogy with actual women and their veils, see Goffen, *Titian's Women*, p. 50. The classic study of covered portraits is Angelica Dülberg, *Privatporträts: Geschichte und Ikonologie einer Gattung im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1990. Interestingly, Dülberg discusses another portrait of Bianca Capello with

The portrait's frame was, different from the (ephemeral) covers, permanently displayed around the painting, not on top of it or covering the painting from view, but always interacting with it, engaged in an everlasting dialogue. One of the conspicuous items which made up the frame were the semi-precious stones. While obviously meant to enhance the frame's beauty and material value, something more needs to be said about them. In the Middle Ages, semi-precious stones were already invested with myriad meanings, beginning with those in a Christian, allegorical register. In the early modern period, the significance of stones even became more varied, and therefore more difficult to retrieve. Yet, there are ways to make sense of them. Lodovico Dolce, whom we have encountered many times before, wrote a little book about stones, in which the central question was not so much about signification, but rather about what he calls '*virtù*', power: all that mankind may wish for can be satisfied by the power of stones. Quoting the Biblical king Solomon, Dolce enumerates stones' various effects:

> There are diverse virtues in stones. Some make a person acquire the grace of the Lords; some make resistant to fire; some make men beloved; others make them wise; others invisible; others throw back lightning; some render poisons harmless; some protect treasures and make them grow; others make husbands love their wives; some calm down storms at sea; others cure illness; others protect the head and the eyes.[126]

In short, as part of God's creation, they are there to serve man.[127] Now, according to the survey that Dolce's book contains, all stones used in Bembo's frame (lapis lazuli, jasper, carnelian, agate, and crystal) have beneficial effects on human health. And three of the five – jasper, carnelian, and crystal – have

remarkable accessories: a portrait by Alessandro Allori, its back is decorated after Michelangelo's *Dream* drawing, originally stored in a wooden box (pp. 146–148 and cat. no. 193, p. 242).

[126] 'Diverse virtù sono nelle pietre. Alcune fanno altrui acquistar la gratia de' Signori: alcune fanno resistenza al fuoco: alcune fanno gli huomini essere amata: altre saggi: altre invisibili: altre ributtano il fulmini: alcune estinguono i veleni: alcune conservano et accrescono i thesori: altre fanno, che i mariti amino le mogli: alcune acchetano le tempeste del mare: altre guariscono le infirmità, altre conservano la testa e gli occhi.' Lodovico Dolce, *Libri tre ne i quali si tratta delle diverse sorti delle Gemme, che produce la Natura, della qualità, grandezza, bellezza, & virtù loro* (Venice, 1565), p. 19r-v.

[127] 'Ultimamente, come cosa piu disiderata dall'huomo, diremo le virtù loro, accioche conosciamo, che ogni cosa prodotta da DIO, è beneficio de gli huomini.' Dolce, *Libri tre ne i quali si tratta delle diverse sorte delle Gemme*, p. 28r.

specific effects on the female body: they stagnate menstruation, help women to conceive, and also assist during their pregnancy and birth giving; they fill female breasts with milk. What is more, jasper was believed to cure hydropsy, an illness Bianca Capello was known to suffer from; and given her general obsession with her health and her great and widely known wish to become pregnant, could it be that Bembo chose these particular stones for their expected beneficial effect on Bianca's body?[128] If so, the apotropaic effect of stones (their *virtù*, in Dolce's words) was apparently also believed to operate in connection with the patient's image, not necessarily with the patient herself. It is known that Bianca, just like many women of her time, resorted to magicians, potions and amulets in order to become pregnant; these amulets would normally be worn on the body.[129] Here, the stones in the picture frame take over that amulet function. Juxtaposed to and touching the image of the woman-patient, they were hoped to have an effect on the image's prototype.

Stones may have borne other meanings, too. Pursuing the analogy with cult images a bit further, we may also look at the stones in the frame as a type of (votive) offering. Bianca, the represented lady, has bestowed her friend Bembo with the precious gift of her portrait; framing this portrait in these semi-precious stones, full of meaning and effect, was for Bembo a way to say thanks, to show his gratitude. In that sense it is not even relevant whether the frame actually ever existed: it was there in the letters to Bianca, conjured up in front of the reader's mind's eye, and thus effective anyhow. That also many other Italian poets, following the Petrarchan tradition, used stones as metaphors for their ladies' body parts is particularly relevant in this context: the stones may have represented the rosiness of Bianca's cheeks, the sparkle in her eyes, the whiteness of her teeth, and so on, referring to the painting's subject just as the painted personifications did.[130]

[128] For Bianca's hydropsy, or oedema, see Gaspare de Caro in: D.B.I., vol. X, s.v. 'Bianca Capello, granduchessa di Toscana', pp. 15-16, here p. 16.

[129] See De Caro, 'Bianca Capello, granduchessa di Toscana', p. 16. On childbirth in the Renaissance, and the many techniques applied by women to control it, see Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth*, New Haven and London 1999, chapter 5, and p. 21 for Bianca Capello; see also the publications mentioned above, n. 105.

[130] It is well-known that the Medici were fond of so-called *pietre dure*, or richly coloured precious and semi-precious stones, inlayed in the most artful compositions. Sometimes these stones depicted figures, plants and trees, sometimes they were arranged in abstract, geometrical

As Louis Marin wrote, '[t]he frame renders the work autonomous in visible space; it puts representation into a state of exclusive presence; it faithfully defines the conditions of visual reception and of the contemplation of representation as such.'[131] We have seen that Bembo's frame referred to certain qualities of the person depicted within, and in a sense complemented the information on Bianca's outside contained in the painting with particulars on her character. It is likely that it also had an apotropaic function, not just as a physical protection of the representation, but as a safeguard of the body represented. The frame constructed ways of viewing the portrait; it enhanced its aura as a painting; without it the portrait was unfinished, indistinct, dangerously open, naked.

But above all, the frame referred to Francesco Bembo. As a form of livery, a recurrent practice in this period whereby people (servants, wives) were dressed by patrons (masters, husbands) in order to construct a relation of dependence, he dressed Bianca's portrait to mark it as belonging to him.[132] For it was not a neutral agent such as an artist who designed the frame; it was, as we know, all Francesco's choice to show her in this particular manner, to stress these virtues and neglect other aspects of her person. Furthermore, it was all Francesco who, by means of this portrait in its frame decided how to present Bianca in Venice, to determine who would see her and when, and what side of her person would receive attention. The frame, therefore, was not only one of his tools to make this happen; his activities as Bianca's representative were also reflected in it; the frame was a meta-image, a representation of Francesco's ownership and social position.[133]

patterns. It remains unclear whether the pieces of stone in Bembo's frame were actually inlayed in the *pietre dure* manner and have anything to do with the Medici family in that sense.

[131] Louis Marin, 'The Frame of Representation and Some of its Figures', in: Paul Duro (ed.), *The Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 79-95, here p. 82.

[132] See, for example, Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, p. 5; also Paul Matthews, 'Apparel, Status, Fashion: Woman's Clothing and Jewellery' in: Dagmar Eichberger (ed.), *Women of Distinction: Margret of York, Margret of Austria*, Leuven 2005, pp. 147-153.

[133] On frames (in the broad sense) and their relation to the metapictorial, see Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image*, *passim*.

A Civic Ritual

In his letters to Bianca, Bembo showed himself very much aware of social stratification. As he presented it to her, the people who came to visit the portrait did not come independently, haphazardly, but were part of clear and distinct social groups. In Bembo's account, the first group to stand face-to-face with the painting, as we have seen, were the women living in his house, among whom his wife. Other groups were artists, friends of Bembo's, *avvocati* (men working for the Venetian government), but also people from other cities such as the *vicentini* (from Vicenza) and the *bresciani* (from Brescia). 'The magnificent portrait of Your Highness is praised more every day, by anyone who sees it, and by every sort of person; besides the painters, sculptors, miniaturists, and people of similar professions, there have been many judicious persons, such as *avogadori*, senators, and others.'[134] As is suggested in Bembo's letters and also in those written by others, these different social groups neatly followed each other. It is remarkable that the complete succession of visitors showed a gradual shift from those people very close to Francesco, such as his wife and the maids, or close to Bianca, such as her brother, towards those people that both of them had probably never heard of before, anonymous visitors from Venetian mainland dominions.

In fact, Bembo's presentation of this hierarchically structured succession of people shows an interesting parallel with Venetian ducal and other processions, held so often in that city during the sixteenth century. As Edward Muir has shown, these heavily formalized and institutionalized events not only illustrated Venice's constitution and hierarchic social structure, but also helped to create that ideology anew every time.[135] In the sixteenth century, the organization of these ducal processions had become fully professionalized and in special legislation the exact position of every officer was securely laid down (fig. 89). Bembo's description of the process of people visiting his portrait of Bianca Capello is remarkable not so much because of its hierarchic structure as such; it is much more significant that he seems to have relied on patterns he knew from Venetian civic ceremonies to interpret what he saw.

[134] 'Il bell.mo ritratto di V.A. è ogni dì più commendato da ogni uno, che lo vede, et da ogni qualità di persona oltra li pittori, et scultori, miniatori, et simili intendenti, vi sono stati molte persone giuditiose; come Avocati, clar.mi et altri.' A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5942, c. 352v.
[135] Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, p. 189 and further.

With no legislation available, no rules, nor an official master of ceremonies, Bembo *cum suis* had recourse to familiar habits and well-known rituals. As we have seen, Petrarchism was one of his models; the rites of the Venetian state were another. What is more, practicing such rituals Venetians made remarkably little distinction between people and their images.

We can make other comparisons between the newly invented ritual behaviour around Bianca's portrait and already existing rituals in late sixteenth-century Venice. In Bembo's mind, the painting was not only the centre of a procession, waiting passively, so to say, for the faithful to pass by; he also took it on several trips through the city. The first trip was very soon after the portrait's arrival, to Jacopo Contarini.[136] The second time was a few weeks later, when Bembo brought the portrait to the Capello family.[137] When the painting's frame was finally finished and attached, this was the occasion for Francesco to take his precious image on another journey, as we have seen: to the Doge's Palace, the very centre of Venice's government and society. It is particularly this trip to the Doge, elaborately described both by Bembo and another visitor of the Doge's Palace on that day in June, that we may compare to another Venetian civic ritual, namely the so-called 'coronation of the Dogaressa', in which the wife of the newly elected Doge officially entered the Ducal Palace.[138] This is not to say Bembo consciously mimicked the coronation rite when he took the portrait to the Doge; my aim is to give an impression of the ritual forms available to him through one eloquent example.

In the course of the sixteenth century, the Venetians performed the coronation of the Dogaressa only twice, mainly because such a display of power and wealth was considered a violation of sumptuary laws. The first time was in 1557, when it was re-installed by Doge Lorenzo Priuli in 1557; the second time was with the election of Doge Marin Grimani in 1595. The latter was a particularly sumptuous coronation ceremony which saw Morosina Morosini to the throne – who , incidentally, belonged to the same family as Bianca Capello's mother.[139] On the day of her coronation, Morosina

[136] A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5938, c. 690r.
[137] A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5942, c. 99r.
[138] For the letter by Bembo see A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5942, cc. 649r-650r; for the letter by one Mazzino Hebreo, who was also present, see cc. 663r-v.

Capello's mother.[139] On the day of her coronation, Morosina was accompanied from her private palace to the Grand Canal for a boat trip ending at the Piazzetta San Marco (fig. 90). The boat in which the Dogaressa was rowed, was designed by the architect Vincenzo Scamozzi, and its decoration contained diverse allegorical elements, showing that the Doge and Dogaressa were personally elected by Saint Mark to rule both land and sea. Having arrived at the Piazzetta, Morosina passed through a triumphal arch, which even more explicitly showed the power and nobility of the Grimani and Morosini families. Both Scamozzi's boat and the triumphal arch quite literally 'framed' the Dogaressa by demonstrating her character, virtues and power. In this sense, they remind one of the frame that Francesco Bembo designed for Bianca Capello's portrait, which equally referred to the depicted person kept within.[140] The final stage of the Dogaressa's coronation meant that Morosina Morosini entered the Doge's Palace and visibly took possession of it by sitting on the Doge's throne in the Senate Hall.

When the portrait of Bianca Capello entered the palace, the Doge, very delighted by it, as Bembo recounts, took it to his private quarters and placed it on a little table with a crucifix and his *corno*.[141] As we have seen, the visit culminated in arrangements made by Bembo and the Doge for the painting's stay in the palace over night. The portrait of Bianca Capello was allowed to enter the very heart of the Republic. As the Doge explained: 'When she comes to Venice, I'm sure I can't stop myself from kissing her, and I'm allowed to as Doge, for I represent the Republic, to which she is a daughter…'[142] Again we see that ways to deal with the portrait were provided for by already existing types of formal behaviour.

Francesco Bembo, a Man in Politics

Above we formulated the question: 'why Francesco Bembo?' At this point, this question is still open. We may even wonder whether it can be answered

[139] Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, p. 293 and further.
[140] By analogy, we could also consider the picture frame as a kind of triumphal arch.
[141] A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5942, cc. 649r-v.
[142] 'Ma io hò a [dir] di meglio à V.A. che hà detto sua ser.ta da princ.o, mentre diceva; ò che bella Donna, [egli] dico, che disse poi. Se ella verrà à Venetia, certo non mi potrò tenere, che non la baci, et lo potrò fare come Principe, come quello [che] rapp[rese]nta la Rep.ca, di cui ella è fig.la…' *Mediceo del Principato* 5942, c. 650r.

satisfactorily at all. Over the last pages, we have gained a better understanding of Francesco Bembo's personal motives; but to Bianca Capello, Bembo may have been just as suitable a candidate to keep her portrait as any other – within the boundaries of a certain defined group, to be sure. Indeed, rather than a goal in himself, Bembo, admittedly a rather marginal figure, seems to have been an intermediary. With whom did he bring Bianca in touch? In the last part of this chapter, we will delve into Bembo's political affiliations, in order to argue, ultimately, that the cult around Bianca's portrait had a strong political dimension.

Information about the circles Francesco Bembo moved in may be retrieved from the letters he wrote to Capello during his journey to Florence and Rome in the autumn of 1585. Indeed, his mission is of seminal importance if we want to understand his political ties. What was the goal of this mission? The month of April 1585 had seen the election of a new Pope, Sixtus V, and to officially congratulate him, the Republic of Venice sent four extraordinary ambassadors to Rome: Marc'Antonio Barbaro, Leonardo Donato, Giacomo Foscarani, and Marin Grimani – who would later become Doge, as we have seen.[143] The four ambassadors were accompanied by a number of other men, of whom, at least for a part of the mission, Francesco Bembo was one. Bianca's father was also involved, in the sense that he kept his daughter informed about the mission and frequently recommended the ambassadors to her attention.

Francesco Bembo's many letters to Bianca, which he wrote during his trip, do not openly mention the mission's aim. The ambassadors seem to have had other, in reality more important tasks than to congratulate the Pope; Bembo, in turn, seems to have had a commission of his own. Several times he refers to his 'business' on behalf of Bianca, his 'first' task, of which he is glad it has 'succeeded'. Once in Rome, one of the people he visited is 'the most Illustrious Cardinal', no-one less than Ferdinando de' Medici, at that time still prince of the church in Rome, but later to succeed his brother Francesco I as grand duke. Much of the considerations in Francesco's letters of these days are about the route the ambassadors will take on their way back:

[143] Leopold von Ranke, *Die römischen Päpste, ihre Kirche und ihr Staat im sechzehnten und siebzehnten Jahrhundert*, vol. III, Leipzig 1867, p. 116. For documents regarding this mission see *Dispacci degli ambasciatori al Senato: indice*, Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Rome 1959, p. 221.

through Tuscany, including another visit to the Medici court, or via Romagna. Many negotiations took place but eventually the route through Tuscany was decided on, which led Bembo to visit Bianca once more. When the ambassadors finally returned to their home country, they went to her family to express their gratitude, as letters from her father and sister-in-law attest to, and also the Pope sent her a letter of thanks.[144]

This may all seem rather enigmatic, but what it does teach us is that Francesco Bembo played a part in the Republic's contacts with Florence and the Holy See. This is not only apparent in his journey as such but also in the type of people he was surrounded with. His fellow travellers to Rome came from families that had intimate ties to the Papacy, were intent on concentrating power in Venice in their own hands and used their patronage, strongly inspired by Tuscan and Roman examples, to set themselves apart as a group.[145] The families of the four ambassadors belonged to these *romanisti*; and of course, the Bembo's themselves had strong Medici and papal connections.[146]

What is more, Francesco Bembo had another powerful *romanisto* friend, who did not join the diplomatic journey to Rome but is all the more relevant: Jacopo Contarini (1535-1595).[147] Characterized by Tafuri as 'Daniele Barbaro's most interesting cultural heir', Contarini was a senator, a great collector, and a host to artists and other culturally interested figures, whom he all entertained at his house at S. Samuele.[148] One of his contemporaries called him a 'connoisseur of all beautiful things'; he was a patron of Palladio, Veronese, and the Bassano's, and was part of the committee that devised the new decorative programme for the Doge's Palace after it burned down in 1577.[149]

[144] All these letters can be found in *Mediceo del Principato* 5940.

[145] Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, p. 7.

[146] Oliver Logan, *Culture and Society in Venice, 1470-1790: The Renaissance and its Heritage*, London 1972, p. 78.

[147] Surprisingly, the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* does not contain a lemma for Contarini. The most important discussions of his patronage is Michel Hochmann, 'La collection de Giacomo Contarini', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome, Moyen Âge - Temps Modernes* 99 (1987), pp. 447-489; see also Giorgio Tagliaferro, 'Quattro Jacopo per Montemezzano', *Venezia Cinquecento* 11 (2001), pp. 141-154 and Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, p. 130 and further.

[148] Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, p. 130.

[149] It was Girolamo Porro who called Contarini this way, when he dedicated Vincenzo Scamozzi's *Discorsi sopra le antichità di Roma* to him; quoted after Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, p. 130. For the Doge's Palace and its post-1577 decorations, see above, Introduction. It is interesting that one of the other members of the committee, the Camaldolese monk fra Girolamo Bardi, was a Florentine historian.

He had also had a central part in the ceremonial entry for the French king Henry III in 1573.[150] Bembo liked to stress Contarini's relation to Bianca Capello, of whom Contarini supposedly was an 'old servant'.[151] Contarini was one of the first to actually see Bembo's portrait of Bianca – apart from the Bembo and Capello families – and soon ordered a copy of it, by 'Bassano', to enhance his collection of paintings.[152] He had a broad collection, of which a portrait gallery, inspired by that of Pietro Bembo in Padua, was only a small part.[153] The eighteenth-century art critic Anton Maria Zanetti may well have seen a copy of Bianca's portrait when he saw Contarini's collection, by then donated to the state: 'lower, the first on the right, a portrait of a woman dressed in the old Venetian manner, is by Bassano, an admirable thing.'[154] Jacopo Contarini was, by the way, not the only powerful figure in Francesco Bembo's *romanisto* circle who saw the portrait: it was also shown to Marin Grimani and Federico Badoer, among others.

It seems that this circle of *romanisti* or *papalisti* took an interest in Bianca Capello for her key position as a Venetian daughter so close to the Tuscan grand-ducal throne and the papal court. Furthermore, the *romanisti* very well understood the political powers of art.[155] It is against this background that we may see their celebration of Bianca Capello's portrait owned by Bembo: as the image of this woman standing with one foot in Venice and with the other in central Italy, 'princess in the one and the other state,' and painted in

[150] Fenlon, *The Ceremonial City*, p. 210.

[151] Bembo wrote: 'Son stato più volte con il cl.mo s.or Giac.o Contarini […]; il quale m'ha detto che è antico ser.re suo; et gode grand.te à sentir raccontar di lei, quando la intende, e quanto la può comprendere.' A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5940, c. 826r.

[152] 'Di già il s.or Giac.o instant.te me ne hà ricercata una copia, che la vuole di man del Bassano, che si è fatto molto valente in vero.' A.S.F., *Mediceo del Principato* 5938, c. 690v. Somewhat later, Bembo had also plans to take the portrait to the Grimani house; Marin Grimani, who had joined him to Florence and Rome and would be the next Doge, was an uncle of Elena Capello, wife of Bianca's brother Vittore: 'Bisognerà ch'io mandi il ritratto à Cà Grimani, e che renda il favor all'ill.mo s.or [Marin], che mi [postò] il ritratto del Papa; s.s. lo ha saputo, et non [sò] come, et fà river.za à V.A. et cosi il cl.mo s.or Giac.o Cont.ni.' *Mediceo del Principato* 5938, c. 691r.

[153] See Hochmann, 'La collection de Giacomo Contarini'. Above we already saw that Contarini planned to hang his copy of the portrait next to that of Caterina Corner.

[154] 'Più abbasso il primo dalla parte destra [il ritratto] d'una femmina vestita all'antica viniziana è del Bassano, cosa ammirabile.' Quoted after Hochmann, 'La collection de Giacomo Contarini', p. 467.

[155] Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, particularly pp. 1-13.

a characteristically non-Venetian manner, it was for the *romanisti* an ideal vehicle with which to mark themselves as a group and enhance alliances.

So who was Francesco Bembo? He was an agent who used a painted portrait to enhance contacts between a faction in Venetian politics and the Florentine and papal courts. Was he unique? Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that we know of no-one else in his circle who took such an obsessive interest in a portrait. No, because there were other intermediaries like him. One example is Maffeo Venier, like Bembo member of a prominent Venetian noble house, poet, and servant to the court of Francesco I in Florence and Popes Gregory XIII and Sixtus V. Supported and protected by Bianca Capello, whom he left possessions at his death in 1586, Venier hardly managed to be elected to positions of political significance in Venice, as the government was afraid that he would act as a spy.[156] Indeed, information we possess about the last years of Francesco Bembo's life confirm that such a fear was not unjust. For the only time Francesco Bembo actually makes an appearance in the history books, is in connection with espionage. As Nicolò Contarini, a seventeenth-century Doge and chronicler noted:

> Among the nobility there was a certain Francesco Bembo, a vain man of little credit, […] who in the progression of years had obtained a magistracy with which, for a certain period, he had had access to the senate. Won over by an Italian prince, he was being paid by him to leak secrets of state, and he continued in this way for the period of the magistracy, which was two years. Having resigned [from this function], he wanted to go on, in order not to lose the profit, and he did it in such a way that he asked now this person, then that person from the senate what they were doing, and having wrenched out a certain thing he would inform [the prince] of it. When he was discovered and his writings were retrieved, no longer able to deny, he confessed, and he was infamously and publicly brought to death.[157]

[156] Margaret F. Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan: Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth-Century Venice*, Chicago 1992, p. 49 and n. 110.

[157] 'Tra la nobiltà un Francesco Bembo, huomo vano, di poco credito, molto profuso nel senso, et angustissimo de' beni di fortuna, che nel progresso dell'età haveva ottenuto un magistrato, col quale per certo tempo haveva havuto ingresso nel senato; essendo stato guadagnato da un Principe d'Italia, pigliò stipendio da lui con propalarli secreti publici, et così continuò per il tempo del magistrato, che fù di due anni, ma uscito volendo seguitare per non perder il provento, lo fece in maniera tale che dimandando hora a questo, hora a quello del senato

Who was this 'Principe d'Italia' mentioned by Contarini? Gian Carlo Sivos, another seventeenth-century chronicler, has the answer: '[i]l duca di Fiorenza'.[158] No matter how small a figure Francesco Bembo may have been on the stage of Italian politics at large, here we have the evidence that he was not only active in the Venetian bureaucracy, but more importantly as an informant of a foreign court, the same court that he was in touch with when Bianca Capello was still alive, and he adored her painted portrait.

Conclusion: The Politics of Portraiture

In 1585, Pope Sixtus V already exposed portraits of Bianca Capello and her husband Francesco I in the church of St Peter's in Rome, where that of Bianca attracted most attention.[159] In Venice, it were above all the *papalisti* who celebrated Bianca's portrait. For them, the image became a token with which to celebrate Veneto-Tuscan-Roman friendship. It is this political dimension, I believe, that is the most extraordinary feature of the cult of the portrait of Bianca Capello.

The main instigator of this Venetian cult was Francesco Bembo, himself a member of the *papalisti* faction. In the many letters written to Bianca, Bembo constructed a romantic relationship between Bianca, the painting and himself, which he modelled on Pietro Bembo's literary love affairs which the latter modelled on Petrarch. This is not to say that Francesco Bembo's literary enterprise was a fiction: in Bembo's world, it could affect his social status in a

quello, che si facesse insidiosamente cavata qualche cosa la. scoperto, e ritrovate le scritture, non potendo più negare, confessò, onde infamemente fù in publico fatto morire.' B.N.M., ms It. VII. 176 (= 8619), *Delle Historie Venetiane et altre loro annesse cominciando dall'anno 1597 e successivamente del serenis. D. D. Nicolò Contarini doge*, c. 248v. See also Cicogna, *Delle inscrizioni*, vol. III, p. 283. According to Cicogna, the position held by Bembo during his membership of the senate was that of *Provveditore sopra Dazzi*, a sort of customs officer. For more on the *Provveditori sopra Dazzi*, and other positions in the Venetian senate, see Kurt Heller, *Venedig: Recht, Kultur und Leben in der Republik 697-1797*, Vienna 1999, especially pp. 417-418.

[158] 'Alli 6 luglio dell'istesso anno la mattina sull'alba vidi tagliar la testa a ser Francesco Bembo […] detto il Poeta. Fu detto per haver scritto al duca di Fiorenza le cose di stado, procurando d'esser provisionato dal detto duca.' Quoted after Cicogna, *Delle inscrizioni*, vol. III, p. 283. It is absolutely intriguing that Jacopo Marcello, friend of Jacopo Contarini, is mentioned by Cicogna in connection with Francesco Bembo's high treason: as an apparent accomplice, Marcello was put in jail for six years (see *Delle inscrizioni*, vol. V, p. 564).

[159] Berti, *Il Principe del Studiolo*, p. 68. Bianca had always had a good relationship with Sixtus – she even received a Golden Rose from him: Musacchio, 'Objects and identity', p. 483. About the Golden Rose, see Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, *Il corpo del Papa*, Turin 1994, pp. 115-117.

very real way. Nevertheless, Francesco Bembo seems to have remained a rather minor figure; indeed, the story of his death suggests that he reached too high. It is telling – and sad, in a way – that, in another one's record of the visit the portrait of Bianca Capello paid to the Doge, nothing is lacking but, indeed, Francesco Bembo's name.

At the same time, Venetians also valued Bembo's painting as an artistic object. Praised as a product of Scipione Pulzone, the 'diligent' painter of 'timeless' works, it was recognized as a precious collectible by connoisseurs and as a model to be copied by Venetian artists. In fact, appreciation of the portrait as a presence of a beloved prototype (Capello) and as an artistic achievement of a rare painterly genius (Pulzone) went hand in hand.

And what about Bianca Capello herself? To what extent was the portrait an index of her agency? Talking about the changing role of women in Venetian public ceremonies during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Edward Muir signalled that their positions became more and more marginal.[160] On those rare occasions that women were still involved, they were elevated to an ideal status and became the passive subjects of chivalric fantasy. In part, this happened to Bianca Capello, too: although she was actively feeding her presence in Venice by means of the palaces she bought, the letters she sent to Venetian relatives and friends, and her painted portrait, at the same time her remembrance became the plaything of her Venetian admirers, for whom, from the spring of 1586 onwards, her painted portrait was the main focal point.

[160] Muir, *Civic Ritual*, pp. 303-304.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this study I proposed that paintings in sixteenth-century Venice had, what I called, social lives. As we saw, these paintings had a variety of roles, functions, and effects in the period they were produced; roles, functions, and effects that hardly match modern-day ideas about what paintings are and what they do. The case of the Doge's Palace made clear that modern notions of fixed genres tend to become irrelevant when applied to sixteenth-century Venetian paintings: paintings could be *historie*, portraits, and cityscapes at the same time and yet defy our ideas of what all these genres were meant for. The Doge's Palace furthermore showed that in Venice, boundaries between representations of reality and real presence tended to dissolve. Thus, this thesis set out to study a selection of Venetian paintings from the period using a new and interdisciplinary method of approach. This approach is inspired by Alfred Gell's notion of the art nexus, and is contextual in nature, in the sense that it aims to connect paintings with the culture that produced and was the first to use them.

The Artist

Any painting is undeniably made by a human being, a painter. Yet, in sixteenth-century Venice this painter, the one who physically produced the work, did not necessarily play an important part in the social life of his pro-

duct. This became apparent in the case of the *Annunciation* altarpiece in Treviso, where Titian's authorship is merely attributed in later art-historical scholarship, rather than having been acknowledged in the period itself. When the painting became a victim of a violent attack, being defaced with pitch, the sources did not mention Titian or any other artist. The same may be said of the *Christ Carrying the Cross*, owned by the Scuola di San Rocco. Sources dating from the first years that this painting was believed to perform miracles and was promoted as such by the Scuola, do not mention any artist. As we have seen, this situation changed in the course of the century: the miraculous painting was increasingly presented as the product of Titian's brush.

In Venice it was this same period, from about 1550 onwards, that saw a sudden outburst of theoretical writings on the art of painting. These writings, as we have seen in the chapter on the young noblewoman and amateur paintress Irene di Spilimbergo, often discussed the notion of authorship in painting. In these discussions the protagonist was Titian. When Irene di Spilimbergo died, Titian's contribution to bringing Irene back to life was deemed essential: by giving her painted portrait the finishing touch, he could turn it into an almost living surrogate. In the poetry collection composed after Irene's death, the painter as artist takes centre stage. Yet, to suggest that in the second half of the sixteenth century painters had permanently become the most important agents within the art nexus, is to neglect evidence to the contrary. As is shown in Chapter Four, Scipione Pulzone's role as maker of Bianca Capello's portrait often received recognition, but he had altogether little influence on the portrait's social life once it had arrived in Venice. The cult around Capello's portrait was primarily a political phenomenon, to which the artist remained subservient.

Regarding the artist's agency, two general observations need to be made. Firstly, the importance of Titian, which is hard to overestimate. This may seem self-evident, given the artist's well-known prominent position in Venice, Italy, and Europe as a whole. New is Titian's primacy if we want to better understand 'living' art. It is not a mere coincidence that he is related to four of the five paintings intensively discussed in these pages (and the master died, we may remember, before Bianca Capello became grand duchess): it is first and foremost with him that we find the connection between painting, liveliness and authorship. Titian comes to figure as the archetypal demiurge, the god-like creator who invests his creatures with life. In the second place,

throughout the sixteenth century the role of the artist could be subservient to that of other interested parties; from the situation in early modern Venice, where paintings were part of society, to our modern conception of autonomous art as the individual expression of an artist's genius, there is no straight line.

The Prototype

The main question regarding the prototype running through all of the preceding chapters may be formulated as: how did people think of the relation between a painting and the thing or person represented in that painting? As it turned out, this question is particularly hard to answer. In the case of Broccardo Malchiostro, patron of the Treviso *Annunciation*, his painted donor portrait was damaged by his fellow clerics in order to damage its prototype, Malchiostro himself. His caricaturized features on the wall of the Treviso chapter house were painted to make Malchiostro himself look ridiculous. Using images was by all means only one of the strategies his enemies applied: they simultaneously tried to attack Malchiostro's body directly. This behaviour fits in a wider European tendency of that period: images of saints and ecclesiastical representatives were ridiculed and attacked in the same ways as actual human beings. Such interaction with images may be characterized as volt sorcery.

We encounter the same lack of distinction between a painting and the person it represents in the case of the miraculous *Christ Carrying the Cross*. In a way, the painting seems to be just another depiction of Christ; yet that it became the centre of a shrine and attracted masses of pilgrims means that 'that Christ' (*quel Christo*), as certain sources called it, had an added value: the moment it became successful as a miraculous image, it was *the* means for people in its vicinity to reach Christ; it made Christ physically present in Venice. That, around 1550, the painting came to be regarded as a product of a contemporary artist, put Christ as the prototype at a distance – although we may wonder whether this is true for all people who engaged with the painting.

In Chapter Three we have seen how painting and poetry were invoked to revive a person who had passed away. Yet the poem collection for Irene di Spilimbergo also shows that the power of painting was feared to have a sinister side: contributors to the memorial volume, afraid of where artists' ever

increasing powers of lifelike representation might lead to, insinuate that paintings may extract life from the painter. Apart from that, this remarkable collection of poetry, expressing collective mourning over the death of a young and talented woman, can hardly conceal that Irene herself had no influence on the development of her 'image'; or on the life lived by her painted portrait. Compared to that, we may expect Bianca Capello to have managed to keep a tighter grip. As a living woman in a relatively powerful position, she decided to send a painted portrait of herself to Venice. Once there, it came to act as a stand-in for her which she could not really control.

As these reflections make clear, the exact relation between paintings and their prototypes is difficult to grasp. There was not always a direct link between prototype and owner, or between prototype and painting, and each party in a painting's network had an agenda of his own. Part of the difficulty arises from the fact that some sources *do* distinguish very clearly between a painting and whom it represents. This was illustrated in particular in Chapter Four, where the owner of Capello's portrait explicitly differentiated between the lady herself, far away in Florence, and the portrait he was holding in front of him. We may suggest that on the cognitive level, people distinguished between paintings and their fellow human beings; yet socially, they easily neglected these distinctions and thereby made them disappear.

The Recipient

Regarding those who commissioned, owned, or simply visited the paintings under discussion we have encountered both continuity and change. First of all, many of the users of paintings discussed had some kind of relation with the Holy See; many of them modelled their artistic patronage on central-Italian examples. This is far from self-evident in the Venetian Republic, which officially took an independent position in relation to the Vatican. Yet my research shows that there was much more cultural exchange with other parts of the Italian peninsula, and in particular with Rome, than is usually thought. What is more, paintings with what we could call a flowering social life seem to have mostly existed where political, religious, social, and cultural interests converged.

Apart from that, the four chapters have made a development visible towards institutionalization and increasing interference by the Venetian state.

The success of the miraculous *Christ Carrying the Cross* may be defined as a bottom-up phenomenon: it started with some 'ordinary people', was then recognized as an opportunity by the Scuola's administration and as such became part of the Scuola's attempts to rival with other Venetian confraternities and to emulate the State. In Treviso, Broccardo Malchiostro's *Annunciation* was installed to guarantee its patron's salvation, as well as to enlarge his presence in the worldly domain, but, as we have seen, inadvertently became a victim of opposing factions within the Trevisan diocese. The veneration of Irene di Spilimbergo through painting and poetry was initiated by her family and quickly developed into a pan-Italian event, engaging writers from all over the peninsula. All this happened against the background of a state strengthening its grip on its subjects. A state, furthermore, that had disbanded the Accademia della Fama; which has led scholars to believe the Irene di Spilimbergo project to be an attempt of the suppressed Academy to continue its activities underground. First and foremost, however, the construction of 'Irene' as an ideal woman made visible the cultural, social, and political activities of her family, the Spilimbergo clan. The portrait of Bianca Capello, finally, was introduced top-down by the grand duchess herself. It thus quickly attracted the attention of the Venetian government, as has been shown, and came to play a part on the stage of international politics; which, furthermore, was dominated by the same 'romanist' families that we encountered in earlier chapters.

The Painting

What, then, was the role of the painting itself? This role, I have proposed, lies in the painting's form. To be sure, there are many formal differences between the paintings that have been studied: their (im)mobility, dimensions, and styles all differ. Yet there are a number of formal characteristics which return again and again. A first characteristic I would like to mention is life-size figures. A second characteristic is the representation of eyes in such a way that they invite the viewer to seek eye contact. These two qualities, we may conclude, make the depicted figures – be they hated or loved – physically present. At the same time, we know that the period produced many more paintings meeting these formal requirements, while it is uncertain if they elicited equally intense responses from their audiences. We should therefore be care-

ful with making generalizations regarding the question of form and instead study each case separately. It seems altogether much more fruitful to focus on the producing culture as a whole: the way a painting interacted with its environment was the result of a complex interplay of forces; form only being a small part of that.

Social Life

Paintings in sixteenth-century Venice often were living objects, in the sense that they participated in society. Notwithstanding official church dogma, they interacted with human beings in all kinds of ways: they received visitors and attracted pilgrims; they healed and saved people; they made money; they had people fall in love with them; they provoked aggression and were victims of violence; they worked as agents of artists, of noble families and princely courts; they were beaten; they were kissed and caressed. Therefore, we may consider them as person-like. What this study makes clear is that, in the theatrical environment that was Venice, paintings performed their roles just like human beings did, all of them directed by relatively fixed scenarios that were modelled on church liturgy, on Petrarchism and courtly love, or on the rites of the Venetian state.

What does this mean for our understanding of early modern 'art'? Formulated in terms of Alfred Gell's art nexus, which has structured our investigation throughout – indeed, the object's social life is the outcome, or realization of that art nexus – we may speak of 'art' when the artist's contribution to the art nexus is relatively large; in other words, when the artist's agency, compared to that of other positions in the nexus, is important. The relative importance attributed to the artist and other agents was not primarily the result of a developing 'era of art', as some scholars have argued. It was the other way around: the developing notion of 'art' as such was the accidental outcome of certain political, social and religious constellations. Art objects were instruments in the hands of religious institutions, governments, and families; and so, we could say, was the artist, most of the time. At the end of the sixteenth century, this was still largely true.

What about that other art-historical protagonist, the viewer? The term 'viewer' as such implies a specific kind of relation: between an active, viewing subject and a passive object that is being viewed. Yet, we have seen that

paintings in Venice often were person-like, active participants in social situations. Rather than one-way traffic, the relation between 'viewer' and painting was *inter*active, it went in two directions; the viewer was sometimes also the viewed. In this sense, the term 'viewer' seems inapt to describe the role of people interacting with paintings; for it excludes the agency of the painting. Apart from that, interactions between art objects and people consisted not solely of mutual viewing: as has become clear, they included listening, touching, and other kinds of (imagined) exchange.

Preservation and Display: Some Implications

While nowadays many Venetian paintings from the period are still being preserved in the city, some of them even on the very spot for which they were originally made, countless others have been dispersed, so that Venetian paintings may now be found all over the world. Yet, even if we encounter them on the altars for which they were once destined, or in the halls where they have been hanging for ages, their earliest interactions with the people who made, commissioned, and viewed them have long since become invisible; sometimes to the extent that what I have here defined as their social lives have completely gone out. In this sense, there is a parallel with our modern-day treatment of non-western artefacts which may have implications for the way we view, display, and preserve premodern European art.

In museum studies over the last decades, scholars have been discussing the handling of non-western artefacts that in their cultures of origin count as sacred or alive – what American ritual theorist Ronald Grimes has coined 'object-beings'. Curators have become increasingly aware that by preserving and displaying these living objects 'in the western way' – that is, by encasing them in glass, controlling humidity, filtering out the sun's rays, etcetera – they deny these objects both life and death. My research suggests that we could very well pose the same questions with regard to premodern artefacts from our own culture.

The case of the Spilimbergo portraits may serve as an illustration. Deposited in the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., thus hidden from the public's view, they are neither dead nor alive. The curator's decision not to display them is mainly based on the portraits' bad condition; the fact that the museum currently considers them as painted by one of Titian's followers, and

not by the master himself, seems to carry weight, too. One of the questions arising from my research is whether such traditional arguments should prevail when deciding whether or not to display objects. More in general, we should ask ourselves if we could think of ways to preserve and display premodern European paintings that would do more justice to their living potential, both then and now.

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Samenvatting

Wanneer het schilderijen betreft, denken we meestal aan objecten die de muren van onze kamers sieren, boven de bank of de vergadertafel. Wachtend totdat iemand een blik op ze werpt, hangen ze daar stilletjes. Of we denken aan schilderijen als kunstwerken, tentoongesteld in galeries en musea, waar ze bezoekers tot (ogenschijnlijk) geleerde conversaties aanzetten en voorwerp zijn van esthetisch genot. We denken doorgaans *niet* over schilderijen als actieve deelnemers in het sociale verkeer; als personen tegen wie we kunnen praten wanneer ze ons komen opzoeken.

Ten onrechte, zo laat ik in mijn proefschrift zien. In het Venetië van de zestiende eeuw, het specifieke geval waar deze studie zich op richt, konden schilderijen precies zo functioneren: als actieve deelnemers in sociale situaties met menselijke trekjes. Een goed voorbeeld hiervan is te vinden in een brief die de Venetiaanse patriciër Francesco Bembo schreef aan Bianca Capello, de groothertogin van Toscane, waarin hij een bezoek memoreert dat hij, samen met een geschilderd portret van Capello, aflegde aan het Venetiaanse staatshoofd, de Doge. Het portret, zo valt in de brief te lezen, ging met de Doge en zijn gasten mee aan tafel, waar het de conversatie voor lange tijd bepaalde; later verklaarde de Doge verliefd op het portret te zijn; en uiteindelijk moest Bembo het Dogepaleis zonder zijn portret verlaten, omdat het de nacht bij de Doge zou doorbrengen. Als we de brief serieus nemen, deed het portret van

Bianca Capello dingen die gewoonlijk alleen aan mensen worden toegeschreven: het circuleerde, werd onderhouden tijdens een diner en bracht de nacht door bij een machtig man. De vraag is hoe we een dergelijk bericht, zo oncompatibel met hedendaagse ideeën over hetgeen schilderijen zijn en doen, kunnen interpreteren.

Bij nadere beschouwing blijkt dat schilderijen in zestiende-eeuws Venetië nog veel meer rollen of functies konden vervullen. In mijn introductie sta ik enige tijd stil bij de geschilderde wanddecoraties van het Dogepaleis zelf, aangebracht aan het einde van de zestiende eeuw, om aan te tonen dat deze een veelvoud van rollen speelden. Onder meer werden zij beschouwd als documenten of ongemedieerde historische bewijzen voor een bepaalde loop van de geschiedenis; als levende aanwezigheid van de in de schilderijen geportretteerde mannen; en als producten van de hand van Venetië's beroemdste schilders, zoals Titiaan, die de natuur zo levensecht hadden weten vast te leggen dat deze niet langer geschilderd leek maar de werkelijkheid zelve. Wederom doet zich hier de vraag voor, hoe we deze rollen kunnen begrijpen. Schilderijen zijn immers toch slechts levenloze planken of doeken besmeerd met verf?

In de kunsthistorische literatuur is vooral de laatstgenoemde van de hierboven geïnventariseerde reacties op schilderijen een bekende. In veelal literaire teksten, gedichten, brieven en kunsttraktaten prijzen gecultiveerde auteurs de verworvenheden van de schilderkunst van hun tijd. Binnen de grenzen van deze studie is het vooral Titiaan die zulke lofuitingen ontvangt: hij brengt beweging in zijn schilderijen, die lijken te leven, en zijn figuren zijn niet van verf maar van vlees gemaakt. In het bestaande onderzoek worden deze reacties grofweg op twee manieren geïnterpreteerd: als *topoi* of gemeenplaatsen die ofwel vanwege hun conventionele karakter betekenisloos zouden zijn, ofwel onderdeel zijn van een (autonoom) kunstkritisch en -theoretisch discours. Ook voor mij is het evident dat het prijzen van de levensechtheid van een schilderij in zestiende-eeuws Venetië een conventie was, maar ik bestrijd dat dit geheel en al als een kunstzinnig fenomeen te begrijpen zou zijn. Essentieel is daarbij de vaststelling dat vroegmodern Europa, en zeker *Cinquecento* Venetië, geen autonoom kunstbegrip kende. Schilderkunst was volledig verankerd in de maatschappij en in feite gedienstig aan het religieuze, politieke en sociale domein. Dit heeft consequenties voor de manier waarop we het

functioneren van Venetiaanse schilderijen dienen te bestuderen: namelijk als onderdeel van de cultuur die deze schilderijen voortbracht.

Uiteindelijk roept de inleiding drie nauw met elkaar verbonden vragen op. Ten eerste: schilderijen in zestiende-eeuws Venetië blijken een reeks van functies en effecten op hun beschouwers te hebben gehad, die niet goed aansluiten bij onze hedendaagse ideeën over wat schilderijen zijn; en die evenmin overeenkomen met onze ideeën over vroegmoderne schilderkunstige genres en hun bijbehorende functies. We moeten daarom op zoek naar nieuwe concepten die ons kunnen helpen begrijpen hoe schilderijen werkten. Ten tweede: bij wijze van hypothese kunnen we stellen dat deze schilderijen deel uitmaakten van sociale netwerken. Maar hoe zagen deze netwerken eruit? Wie zaten daarin? En hoe ging die interactie tussen mensen en schilderijen in zijn werk? De derde en laatste vraag, ten slotte, heeft betrekking op de literaire topos van het levensechte schilderij. Hoe moeten we deze topos begrijpen en hoe is de artistieke levensechtheid te verbinden met de 'sociale levensechtheid' van het schilderij?

Om deze vragen te beantwoorden presenteer ik in de tweede helft van de introductie een model dat ik vervolgens in de vier hoofdstukken van het proefschrift toepas. Kerngedachte van dit model is dat schilderijen in het Venetië van het Cinquecento *sociale levens* hadden: ze waren deel van sociale netwerken waarbinnen ze met mensen interacteerden. Deze kerngedachte wordt op twee manieren onderbouwd: zowel theoretisch als historisch. Om met de theoretische onderbouwing te beginnen, deze is geïnspireerd op de theorie van de werking (*agency*) van kunst van de Britse antropoloog Alfred Gell (1945-1997). In zijn boek *Art and Agency* (1998), postuum gepubliceerd, stelt Gell dat kunstobjecten in het kader van een antropologische theorie net als mensen beschouwd kunnen worden als sociale agenten, d.w.z. als handelende personen, die invloed kunnen uitoefenen op andere personen en/of dingen in hun netwerk (*nexus*). Zo'n netwerk waarin kunstvoorwerpen een rol spelen, bestaat uit vier verschillende spelers. Er is het prototype, of degene die in het voorwerp wordt uitgebeeld; de kunstenaar, of degene die het voorwerp heeft gemaakt; de ontvanger of de persoon die het artefact bekijkt, gebruikt en mogelijk ook besteld heeft; en tot slot is er de index, het kunstvoorwerp zelf. Volgens Gell oefent het kunstvoorwerp – of dit nu een versierde kano of een schilderij van Picasso is – invloed uit op de andere spelers in het netwerk, en is het voorwerp tegelijkertijd een levend bewijs dat er

invloed wordt uitgewerkt (vandaar de term 'index', 'aanduiding') door de verschillende spelers via het kunstvoorwerp. Het is nu juist het uitoefenen van invloed (agency) die karakteristiek is voor personen, aldus Gell, en daarom zijn kunstobjecten binnen zijn theorie als personen te beschouwen.

Het belang van Gells theorie voor dit proefschrift schuilt erin dat deze niet is gebaseerd op moderne Westerse concepties van kunst, maar juist is ontworpen als een raamwerk met een in feite universele reikwijdte en daarom bijzonder geschikt is om toegepast te worden op kunst van het vroegmoderne Europa, waarin een heel ander kunstbegrip bestond dan wij tegenwoordig kennen. Omdat het een antropologische theorie is, leidt toepassing ervan, in tegenstelling tot bijvoorbeeld formalistische of semiotische methoden, tot een contextuele analyse en verschuift de nadruk van het werk zelf naar de producerende cultuur in haar geheel. Maar het meest concrete belang van Gells ideeën ligt in de notie van de nexus, die hier wordt gebruikt om de sociale levens van schilderijen te reconstrueren en te ontrafelen.

Zoals gezegd heeft het idee van de sociale levens ook een historische onderbouwing. Uit historisch onderzoek weten we dat zestiende-eeuws Venetië zelf een sociale benadering van persoonlijkheid kende; waarmee ik bedoel te zeggen dat persoonlijkheid sterk in sociale termen werd gedefinieerd, d.w.z. in relatie tot de medemens. In de theatrale samenleving die Venetië was – en ik parafraseer hier de Britse cultuurhistoricus Peter Burke – ging het erom de sociale rol waarvoor men in de wieg was gelegd zo overtuigend mogelijk te spelen. De inherent sociale factoren van verschijning en eer waren hierbij belangrijker dan oprechtheid. In deze theatrale samenleving waren kunstvoorwerpen, waaronder schilderijen, instrumenten waarmee mensen hun publieke verschijning konden versterken, omdat kunstvoorwerpen in deze cultuur van spel en conventies, met deze dóór en dóór sociale definitie van persoonlijkheid, onder bepaalde omstandigheden de rollen van mensen konden overnemen en dus *personen* konden worden. Het gaat er in dit proefschrift in belangrijke mate om de omstandigheden waaronder dit kon gebeuren te achterhalen.

Hierbij meng ik mij in een groter debat. In 1989 zette de Amerikaanse kunsthistoricus David Freedberg met zijn boek *The Power of Images* het onderwerp van de op de beschouwer inwerkende afbeelding op de wetenschappelijke agenda. Hoewel de ondertitel van zijn studie zowel een geschiedenis als een theorie van de reacties op zulke afbeeldingen belooft, is zijn boek

veeleer een alarmerend grote verzameling van zulke reacties die weinig vragen beantwoordt en er vooral veel oproept. Dit proefschrift wil de gedetailleerde analyse bieden waar het in Freedbergs boek nog aan ontbreekt. Een jaar na Freedberg publiceerde de Duitse kunsthistoricus Hans Belting zijn *Bild und Kult* (1990), waarin hij onderscheid maakte tussen het 'tijdperk van het beeld' en het 'tijdperk van de kunst', waarvan hij het begin ten tijde van de Reformatie situeerde. De belangrijkste verandering die dit nieuwe tijdperk met zich meebracht, volgens Belting, was dat God niet langer aanwezig werd geacht in religieuze afbeeldingen, zoals daarvoor algemeen het geval was. Hoewel stevig bekritiseerd is Beltings these nog altijd zeer invloedrijk. In mijn proefschrift betoog ik echter dat de vroegmoderne periode geenszins een 'tijdperk van de kunst' was in de betekenis die Belting eraan geeft en dat de veranderingen die zich in deze periode voordeden in de manieren waarop schilderijen en andere kunstvoorwerpen met hun omgeving interacteerden, slechts gradueel waren.

Ik zal nu eerst op mijn belangrijkste conclusies ingaan alvorens aandacht te besteden aan de afzonderlijke hoofdstukken. Aan het eind van mijn studie kom ik tot een inventarisatie van activiteiten van schilderijen die zoal aan bod zijn gekomen. Ongetwijfeld zijn er, zou men andere gevallen bestuderen, nog heel wat aan het lijstje toe te voegen, maar we kunnen stellen dat schilderijen in zestiende-eeuws Venetië in ieder geval op uiteenlopende manieren met mensen samenleefden, niettegenstaande de officiële leer van de Kerk op dit gebied. Schilderijen ontvingen bezoekers en trokken pelgrims aan; ze genazen en redden mensen; ze verdienden geld; mensen werden verliefd op ze; ze riepen agressie op en werden slachtoffer van geweld; ze werkten als agenten van kunstenaars, adellijke families en vorstenhoven; ze werden geslagen, gekust en geliefkoosd. In de theatrale samenleving die Venetië was vertolkten schilderijen hun rollen op vergelijkbare wijze met mensen; schilderijen zowel als mensen vertoonden zeer conventioneel gedrag en hielden zich aan relatief vaststaande scenario's die waren gemodelleerd naar de kerkelijke liturgie, naar de literaire schema's van het Petrarchisme en de hoofse liefde en naar de riten van de Venetiaanse staat.

Wat betekent dit nu voor ons begrip van vroegmoderne 'kunst'? Geformuleerd in termen van Gells theorie ontstaat de situatie die het meest aansluit bij een modern Westers kunstbegrip, wanneer de bijdrage van de kunstenaar aan het sociale netwerk van het kunstvoorwerp relatief groot is; wanneer de

invloed van de kunstenaar, vergeleken met andere personen in het netwerk, doorslaggevend is. Maar wat dit proefschrift laat zien is dat het belang van de kunstenaar ten opzichte van andere personen, zoals het prototype of de opdrachtgever, niet het resultaat was van een zich ontwikkelend 'tijdperk van de kunst': de notie van 'kunst' als zodanig was veeleer de uitkomst van diverse sociale, religieuze en politieke constellaties. Kunstvoorwerpen, waaronder schilderijen, waren instrumenten in de handen van religieuze instituties, regeringen, en families; en kunstenaars waren dit meestal ook. Deze studie laat bovendien zien dat deze situatie helemaal aan het einde van de zestiende eeuw nog grotendeels onveranderd was.

Wanneer het gaat om effectieve artefacten, of anders gezegd, schilderijen en andere objecten die sterke reacties bij hun beschouwers opriepen, zijn onderzoekers het verre van eens over de vraag waar nu de oorsprong ligt van deze effectiviteit. Opvallend is daarbij dat kunsthistorici veelal wijzen naar het kunstwerk zelf en zijn bijzondere vorm, terwijl antropologen en sociaalhistorici de oorzaak eerder zoeken in de omgeving. In mijn proefschrift laat ik zien dat schilderijen met een complex en bloeiend sociaal leven vooral daar voorkwamen waar politieke, religieuze, sociale en culturele belangen van diverse partijen samenvielen. Alle hier bestudeerde schilderijen hebben daarnaast enkele formele kenmerken gemeen: ze bevatten levensgroot afgebeelde menselijke figuren en één van die figuren heeft zodanig zijn of haar blik naar buiten gericht dat de beschouwer wordt uitgenodigd tot het maken van oogcontact. We vinden deze formele kenmerken echter bij veel meer schilderijen uit de periode terug, waarbij niet altijd iets over de effectiviteit bekend is. Ik concludeer dan ook dat de formele eigenschappen van schilderijen weliswaar een rol lijken te spelen, maar dan wel samen met vele andere factoren; de wijze waarop schilderijen met hun omgeving interacteerden was het resultaat van een complex spel van krachten, waarvan vorm er slechts één was.

Om te laten zien hoe ik tot deze conclusies gekomen ben, zal ik nu de inhoud van de vier opeenvolgende hoofdstukken kort samenvatten. In Hoofdstuk Een staat een religieus schilderij centraal dat vanaf 1520 bekend stond om zijn wonderbaarlijke krachten: gelovigen in Venetië waren van mening dat het schilderij, een *Kruisdragende Christus*, slachtoffers van straatgeweld op bovennatuurlijke wijze kon genezen. Toch zijn het niet enkel religieuze motieven, zo blijkt, die de omgang van mensen met dit schilderij hebben bepaald.

Het werk is vermoedelijk aan het einde van het eerste decennium van de zestiende eeuw gemaakt en bevond zich al snel in het bezit van één van de grootste lekenbroederschappen van Venetië, de Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Over de vraag wie het doek gemaakt heeft, is al veel gestreden, maar het enige dat vaststaat, is dat we het niet zeker weten; Titiaan en Giorgione zijn de meest waarschijnlijke auteurs. Belangrijker dan deze kwestie zijn echter de wonderbaarlijke krachten, zeker in de eerste helft van de zestiende eeuw. Door gelovigen werd het schilderij in staat geacht hen te genezen als was het Christus zelf. Waar kwam dit geloof vandaan?

Allereerst heb ik voor de beantwoording van deze vraag de formele aspecten van het schilderij onderzocht. Hierbij is het van belang dat het om een zeer verstild beeld gaat, waarvan een Christusfiguur het middelpunt vormt die het schilderij uitkijkt richting de beschouwer. Problematisch is dat deze *Kruisdragende Christus* in formeel opzicht veel overeenkomsten heeft met een aantal andere schilderijen gemaakt omstreeks 1510, terwijl het veel minder lijkt op andere wonderbaarlijke objecten, die gewoonlijk reeds een zekere ouderdom bereikt hadden alvorens effectief te worden. Meer aanknopingspunten kunnen we vinden bij een groepje religieuze objecten dat eveneens in het bezit was van de Scuola di San Rocco. Ik denk dan met name aan een miraculeuze bloeiende doorn afkomstig van Christus' kroon; aan een wonderen verrichtende crucifix; en aan de relieken van de patroonheilige van de broederschap. Ik betoog dat de oorsprong van de wonderbaarlijke kracht van het schilderij bij deze objecten gevonden kan worden. Deze kracht werd vervolgens verder verspreid door de talloze adaptaties van het schilderij, gemaakt in allerlei media. Eerder dan het aura van het wonderbaarlijke prototype teniet te doen, versterkten zulke reproducties of adaptaties de kracht van het origineel door het te laten werken voor een groot publiek.

Vanaf omstreeks 1550 zien we een opvallende verschuiving in de manier waarop het schilderij door de Venetianen wordt benaderd. Het begint op te duiken in teksten over de Venetiaanse schilderkunst, waar het weliswaar nog steeds met een wonderbaarlijke werking wordt geassocieerd, maar nu ook met kunstenaars in verband wordt gebracht. Dit is een belangrijke ontwikkeling: niet langer vallen Christus en zijn afbeelding samen; kunstenaars werkzaam in het hier en nu, met name Titiaan, komen tussen beide. De *Kruisdragende Christus* wordt meer en meer beschouwd als het wonderbaarlijke product van Titiaans penseel.

In Hoofdstuk Twee verplaats ik mijn blik naar de provincie, om precies te zijn naar het bisdom Treviso, zelf een bloeiend centrum van renaissancecultuur. Het schilderij waar dit hoofdstuk om draait is een altaarstuk dat in 1523 in de zogeheten Kapel van de Annunciatie in de kathedraal van Treviso werd geïnstalleerd. Het altaarstuk, dat toepasselijk de Annunciatie verbeeldt, wordt traditioneel toegeschreven aan Titiaan, hoewel ook in dit geval, net als in Hoofdstuk Een, vroege bronnen geen kunstenaar noemen. Het schilderij is voor deze studie van belang omdat het drie jaar na zijn installatie slachtoffer werd van een geweldsdaad: getuigenverslagen maken melding van 'pek en ander vuil' dat tegen het paneel werd gesmeten met als doel de afbeelding van de donor, de derde figuur in het schilderij naast Maria en de aartsengel Gabriel, te beschadigen. Ik probeer de vraag te beantwoorden waarom deze aanval heeft plaatsgevonden en de aanval in een sociale en historische context te plaatsen.

Ook in dit hoofdstuk worden de formele aspecten van het schilderij in kwestie onderzocht om te bezien wat hun aandeel is geweest in de respons die het werk heeft opgeroepen. Titiaans *Annunciatie* heeft een innovatief en experimenteel karakter, maar toch is dat niet zozeer wat tot de aanslag heeft geleid. Eerder lijkt dat één onderdeeltje hiervan geweest te zijn, namelijk het portret van de donor, dat niet en profil is weergegeven, zoals gebruikelijk, maar perfect frontaal, terwijl de meest heilige figuur, Maria, van de zijkant wordt getoond. De eerder genoemde getuigenverslagen benadrukken het aanstootgevende karakter van deze weergave: men voelt zich gedwongen de donor vereren in plaats van de Madonna. En dat wordt extra problematisch gevonden omdat de afgebeelde figuur de binnen het bisdom van Treviso zo gehate rechterhand van de bisschop is, een man genaamd Broccardo Malchiostro.

Maar hiermee is de kous nog lang niet af. Want waarom eigenlijk kozen vijandige kanunniken Malchiostro's donorportret tot doelwit als ze de man zelf wilden schaden? Dat is alleen te begrijpen, zo stel ik, als portretten als directe vervangers van hun prototypen werden ervaren. Het is deze directe connectie tussen prototype en afbeelding die eveneens werd geëxploiteerd door de makers van een spottende tekening van dezelfde Malchiostro die nabij de kathedraal op een buitenmuur werd aangebracht. Spotprent en iconoclasme zijn zo te beschouwen als twee kanten van dezelfde medaille: beide richten zich op een afbeelding om de daarin afgebeelde persoon te raken.

Binnen de context van het conflict in Treviso zijn deze twee aspecten vermoedelijk uiteindelijk slechts onderdelen van een veel grotere haatcampagne geweest, waarbij geweld ook tegen mensen niet werd geschuwd. In die zin zijn de gebeurtenissen zeer vergelijkbaar met hetgeen zich in de jaren 1520 ten noorden van de Alpen voltrok: in de vroege jaren van de Reformatie treffen we daar op grotere schaal zowel iconoclasme – geweld gericht op (religieuze) afbeeldingen – als geweld gericht op geestelijken aan. Het paradoxale is dat de iconoclasten juist door afbeeldingen net als mensen geweld aan te doen, hun levensechtheid deden toenemen. De daders van de aanslag in Treviso, zelf geestelijken, en dus op de hoogte van de richtlijnen van de kerk omtrent religieuze afbeeldingen, zo mogen we veronderstellen, hadden beter moeten weten. Zij kozen evenwel voor een strategie die in de praktijk werkte: na de aanval op zijn portret zou Malchiostro geen rol van betekenis meer spelen.

In een *Excursus* die het tweede hoofdstuk besluit, besteed ik kort aandacht aan een verschijnsel dat ik 'poëtisch iconoclasme' noem. Hier wordt een reeks gedichten besproken van de hand van de in Venetië werkzame dichter Niccolò Franco waarin Titiaans geschilderde portretten van Franco's rivaal, Pietro Aretino, bespot worden. Anders dan in het geval van de *Annunciatie* richt de iconoclast zijn pijlen hier ook op de kunstenaar. Met zijn nadruk op poëzie kijkt de Excursus ook vooruit naar de volgende twee hoofdstukken, waarin de dichtkunst een grote rol speelt.

Hoofdstukken Drie en Vier richten zich, anders dan het eerste deel, op ogenschijnlijk profane schilderijen: in beide gevallen staan portretten van adellijke vrouwen centraal. Zoals duidelijk zal worden vormde religie echter een belangrijke inspiratiebron voor de wijze waarop mensen met deze schilderijen omgingen. Hoofdstuk Drie behandelt de geschilderde en geschreven portretten van Irene di Spilimbergo (1538-1559), afkomstig uit een adellijk geslacht uit de Friuli, die zich met haar familie in Venetië vestigde en daar onder meer actief werd als amateurschilderes. Haar tegenwoordige bekendheid dankt ze aan het feit dat er na haar dood door haar bewonderaars een zeer omvangrijke dichtbundel in haar nagedachtenis werd gepubliceerd, waar dichters vanuit heel Italië werk voor aanleverden. Veel bijdragen aan deze bundel gaan over de schilderkunst: enerzijds over – soms denkbeeldige – portretten van Irene geschilderd door kunstenaars als Titiaan, die haar, zo maken de gedichten duidelijk, ook na haar dood in leven konden houden.

Anderzijds zijn Irenes eigen schilderactiviteiten een onderwerp. Hier neemt het commentaar van de dichters een heel andere wending: het schilderen van levensechte schilderijen wordt beschouwd als een overmoedige daad, die de kunstenaar, door ingrijpen van christelijke of antieke goden, uiteindelijk het leven kost.

Dit discours over schilderkunst, leven en dood bepaalt een deel van de inhoud van het hoofdstuk. Een ander deel gaat over twee daadwerkelijk geschilderde portretten van Irene en haar zus Emilia, tegenwoordig bewaard in de National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., en hun opmerkelijke ontstaansgeschiedenis. Deze werken werden enkele jaren voor de vroegtijdige dood van Irene gemaakt door de relatief onbekende schilder Zuan Paolo Pace. Op basis van een combinatie van technisch en schriftelijk bewijs betoog ik dat de schilderijen na de dood van Irene in Titiaans atelier zijn bewerkt. Zo'n bewerking moet gezien worden in de context van een cultuur waarin Titiaan als de ultieme demiurg gold, de goddelijke kunstenaar die met slechts een toets van zijn penseel schilderijen tot leven kon wekken.

Uiteindelijk zijn zowel het portret in Washington als de dichtbundel te beschouwen als substituten van Irene, die haar invloed na haar dood konden continueren. Waaruit bestond deze invloed dan, kunnen we ons afvragen? Deze was, zoals voor bijna alle vrouwen in de zestiende eeuw, slechts zeer indirect. 'Irene di Spilimbergo' blijkt een constructie te zijn vóór en dóór Irenes clan en diens allianties. Het beeld dat de schilderijen en de dichtbundel van Irene creëren is niet dat van een vrouw van vlees en bloed maar van een reeks idealen; van de onbereikbare en onwillige beminde van de dichter tot een heldin uit de Griekse mythologie; van evenbeeld van haar oudere zus Emilia tot een Roomse heilige. 'Irene' blijkt niet in de laatste plaats voor de Kunstenaar zelf te staan, die kort na 1550 ergens in geslaagd was wat nog nooit in die mate was bereikt: levenloze dingen maken die eruitzien alsof ze leven.

In het vierde en laatste hoofdstuk keer ik terug naar het portret van Bianca Capello, waarmee ik mijn proefschrift ook begonnen was. Het bezoek dat dit portret bracht aan de Venetiaanse Doge, zoals hierboven beschreven, blijkt de climax te zijn van een proces dat in het jaar 1586 al maanden gaande was en waarbij het schilderij werd bezocht en vereerd, zo stelt de eigenaar, door honderden mensen. Op basis van tot nog toe grotendeels onbekend en ongepubliceerd bronnenmateriaal kunnen we constateren dat het portret van Ca-

pello, geschilderd door de Romeinse kunstenaar Scipione Pulzone, grofweg drie verschillende rollen speelde – die elkaar overigens geenszins in de weg zaten. Ten eerste ontwikkelde zich er een Platonische liefdesaffaire tussen het schilderij en Francesco Bembo, de Venetiaanse patriciër in wiens bezit het schilderij verkeerde. Ten tweede werd het schilderij een model voor Venetiaanse kunstenaars, die het bewonderden om zijn on-Venetiaanse precisie. Ten derde speelde het een rol op het toneel van de Venetiaanse en pan-Italiaanse politiek door politieke allianties te verstevigen. Ik zal ieder van deze rollen kort toelichten.

Dat er een liefdesrelatie kon ontstaan tussen een man en een geschilderd portret moet begrepen worden in de context van het Petrarchisme, de navolging van het werk van de veertiende-eeuwse Italiaanse dichter Francesco Petrarca, die door de Venetianen als een geadopteerde zoon werd gezien. Bij deze navolging was met name Petrarca's *Canzoniere* of *Liedboek* van belang, zijn sonnettenreeks over zijn liefde voor de onbereikbare Laura. Al bij Petrarca waren door kunstenaars vervaardigde portretten van de beminde en ontoegankelijke dame een gevaarlijk substituut, waarin de idolate dichter zichzelf kon verliezen. Juist in zestiende-eeuws Venetië werd dit gegeven een ware topos, zoals we dat ook tegenkomen in de dichtbundel voor Irene di Spilimbergo. Door voor zichzelf een dergelijke liefdesaffaire met Bianca Capello's portret te construeren plaatste Francesco Bembo zich dan ook in een eerbiedwaardige traditie waarmee hij zijn sociale positie probeerde te verbeteren.

Bembo behoorde tot een minderheid binnen het Venetiaanse patriciaat – en hiermee komen we op de politieke rol van het schilderij – die zich zowel cultureel als politiek sterk op Rome en de Heilige Stoel richtte. Bianca Capello zelf had een functie voor deze groep, omdat ze Venetiaanse van geboorte was en haar familie tot het Venetiaanse patriciaat behoorde, maar ondertussen was getrouwd met de groothertog van Toscane, Francesco I de' Medici, wiens broer Ferdinando weer een machtige kardinaal in Rome was. Daar ze zelf echter nooit meer in Venetië kwam, werd haar geschilderde portret een verzamelplaats voor haar politieke vrienden.

Tegelijkertijd werd het portret ook om zijn artistieke kwaliteiten bewonderd. De belangrijkste kunstenaars die in de jaren 1580 nog actief waren kwamen het werk bezoeken en maakten kopieën, die vervolgens in andere Venetiaanse collecties terechtkwamen. Het is opvallend dat een waardering van het portret als een surrogaat van het prototype (Capello) en als een artis-

tieke prestatie van een kunstzinnig genie (Pulzone) compleet door elkaar liepen.

Tot slot zal ik hier nog kort enkele subconclusies uiteenzetten en een belangrijke implicatie van mijn onderzoek benoemen. Wat betreft de positie van de kunstenaar is gebleken dat deze lang niet altijd belangrijk was of zelfs maar zichtbaar. We hebben gevallen bestudeerd waarin de kunstenaar in het sociale leven van het schilderij geen enkele rol van betekenis speelt. Anderzijds is er één kunstenaar die het discours over levensechte schilderij grotendeels in zijn eentje bepaalde: Titiaan. In de loop van de zestiende eeuw wordt hij meer en meer beschouwd als een goddelijke schepper, die zijn doeken niet met verf maar met vlees besmeert. Toch loopt er niet een rechte lijn van Titiaan naar de moderne kunstenaar: ook aan het einde van de zestiende eeuw waren kunstenaars, zo zagen we in het geval van het portret van Bianca Capello, doorgaans ondergeschikt aan sociale en politieke belangen. Als het om het prototype gaat, de in het schilderij uitgebeelde persoon, kunnen we stellen dat schilderijen zodanig werden behandeld dat er een directe connectie tussen prototype en schilderij tot stand kwam. In veel gevallen maken gebruikers van de schilderijen slechts zeer weinig onderscheid tussen de schilderijen en de erop afgebeelde personen. Deze personen hadden zelf weinig invloed op hetgeen er met hun portretten gebeurde: deze konden vereerd maar ook vernield worden, en in beide gevallen trof dat de prototypen direct. Tegelijkertijd werden schilderijen geprezen als artistieke prestaties en ik zou dan ook niet willen beweren dat de Venetianen schilderijen stelselmatig voor levende wezens in biologische zin aanzagen. Op sociaal niveau leefden de schilderijen echter wel degelijk.

Een vraag die dit alles oproept, ten slotte, is wat er tegenwoordig nog merkbaar is van deze sociale levens. De schilderijen waar dit proefschrift over gaat zijn door de eeuwen heen verspreid geraakt, maar zelfs in die gevallen waar ze zich nog op hun oorspronkelijke locatie bevinden is er van de soort van interacties die in dit boek worden beschreven niets meer over. Doet de huidige manier van conserveren en tentoonstellen de Europese schilderkunst van vóór de moderne tijd recht?

De portretten van de zusters Spilimbergo zijn misschien wel het meest sprekende voorbeeld. In de National Gallery of Art hangen zij in het depot, verborgen voor het publiek, aldus bewaard voor het nageslacht maar tegelijkertijd onzichtbaar, dood noch levend. De beslissing om ze niet tentoon te

stellen is deels ingegeven door de slechte conditie van de schilderijen; dat ze worden beschouwd als geschilderd door een navolger van Titiaan en niet door 'de meester zelf', is ook van belang. Mijn onderzoek stelt zulke traditionele argumenten aan de kaak. Meer in het algemeen roept het de vraag op of we alternatieve manieren kunnen bedenken om Europese kunst van voor de moderne tijd te bewaren en tentoon te stellen; manieren die meer recht zouden doen aan de levenskracht van deze werken, vroeger en nu.

Curriculum Vitae

In the summer of 2002, right before I turned eighteen, I completed my pre-university education at the Stedelijk Gymnasium in Nijmegen. I decided to continue my education in another city, at the University of Groningen, where I received my Bachelor and Master in Art History in 2005 and 2006, respectively, both *cum laude*. Later in 2006, I started my tenure as Ph.D. candidate at Leiden University with a project that was part of the research programme *Art, Agency, and Living Presence in Early Modern Italy*, funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). As of September 2011, I have been Annual Fellow (*Jahresstipendiatin*) at the Deutsches Forum für Kunstgeschichte / Centre Allemand d'Histoire de l'Art in Paris.

While in Leiden, I taught classes on Venetian Renaissance Art and gave several guest lectures at other Dutch universities. I delivered papers at various international conferences. In 2010, I co-organised and contributed to a panel at the Annual Meeting of the Renaissance Society of America titled *Art, Agency, and Living Presence in the Early Modern World*. Also in 2010, I was co-organiser of *The Secret Lives of Artworks*, an international conference at Leiden. Among my publications are articles in *Art History* and *Kunstchronik*; an article in *Studiolo* is forthcoming. I am particularly interested in the functions and effects of works of art, as well as their interactions with the viewer.

Illustrations